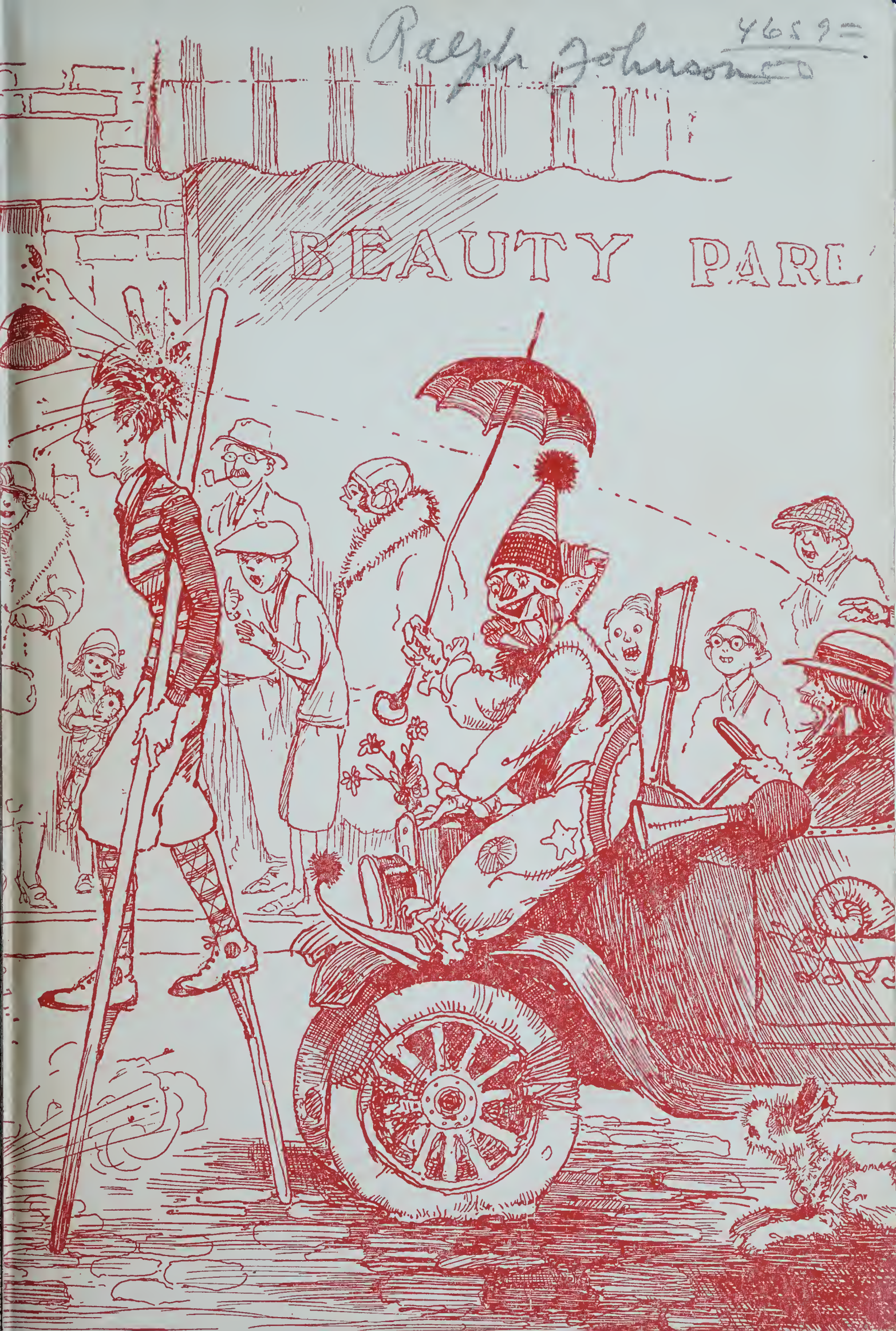
POPPY OTT & CO INFERIOR DECORATORS

BY LEO EDWARDS

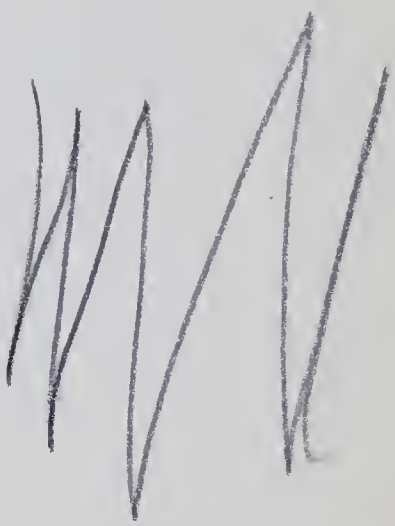

PEDI-
GREED

Ralph Johnson 4659

BEAUTY PARL



POPPY OTT & CO.,
INFERIOR DECORATORS



HE WENT THROUGH IT AGAIN WITH HIS LONG, BONEY, TWITCHING FINGERS——

Poppy Ott & Co. Inferior Decorators

Frontispiece (Page 39)

POPPY OTT & CO.,
INFERIOR DECORATORS

BY

LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF

THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE TUFFY BEAN BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

Printed in the United States of America

To

Mary Jane Kennedy

A true

friend

CONTENTS

LEO EDWARDS' BOOKS

Here is a list of Leo Edwards'
published books:

THE JERRY TODD SERIES

JERRY TODD AND THE WHISPERING MUMMY
JERRY TODD AND THE ROSE-COLORED CAT
JERRY TODD AND THE OAK ISLAND TREASURE
JERRY TODD AND THE WALTZING HEN
JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG
JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG
JERRY TODD IN THE WHISPERING CAVE
JERRY TODD, PIRATE
JERRY TODD AND THE BOB-TAILED ELEPHANT
JERRY TODD, EDITOR-IN-GRIEF
JERRY TODD, CAVEMAN
JERRY TODD AND THE FLYING FLAPDOODLE
JERRY TODD AND THE BUFFALO BILL BATHTUB
JERRY TODD'S UP-THE-LADDER CLUB

THE POPPY OTT SERIES

POPPY OTT AND THE STUTTERING PARROT
POPPY OTT'S SEVEN-LEAGUE STILTS
POPPY OTT AND THE GALLOPING SNAIL
POPPY OTT'S PEDIGREED PICKLES
POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH
POPPY OTT AND THE TITTERING TOTEM
POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE
POPPY OTT HITS THE TRAIL
POPPY OTT & CO., INFERIOR DECORATORS

POPPY OTT & CO.,
INFERIOR DECORATORS

CHAPTER I

AN EXCITING RIDE

THERE was a big party going on at Red Meyers' house. His Aunt Pansy, who lives there, was entertaining some kind of an afternoon book club, and out in the yard Red and I were playing "smack-it," which is the noisiest kind of a croquet game that you ever heard. We made it up ourselves, and since we started playing it that summer we hardly ever played the regular croquet game any more. For "smack-it" was much more fun.

Red, you know, is one of my best pals, and one look at him is enough to tell how he got his nickname, for he has the reddest hair and biggest freckles of any kid I ever knew. I think he's the noisiest kid I ever knew too. For, boy, can he blat! Dad calls him the little squirt with the big squawk. And just now he was whooping it up like a runaway boiler factory.

"You didn't either smack me by that arch," he boomed, at the top of his voice.

"I did too," I boomed back.

"But how could you smack me by that arch and then get clear over there?"

"I curved it," I told him.

"Oh, you're shooting curves, huh? The expert! Well, you've got to show me."

"All right now, you watch," says I, doing it over again. "You were there. See? And I aimed at you like this——"

"Hey, wait a minute, wait a minute!" he bellowed, louder than ever.

"Donald!" a voice called sharply from his front porch, and when we turned, there stood his Aunt Pansy, looking like a big thunder cloud. "I thought I told you to be still around here this afternoon?"

"You told me to keep out of the kitchen, and not eat up any of your party stuff," Red growled.

"Yes, and I told you to be quiet. For I'm entertaining the Ladies' Literary Guild this afternoon. And how can we concentrate, with you and Jerry Todd out there yelling your heads off?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Red, pitching his mallet angrily. "I wish ma'd come home. For a fellow can't do anything around here any more."

"Where is she?" I asked him.

"Oh, she went to Indianapolis on a visit, and I've got to mind Aunt Pansy."

"Yes," Aunt Pansy spoke tartly, "and if you *don't* mind me, and quit that racket out there, I'm going to have your father come home and settle you."

"Well, can I have some sandwiches then?"

"The sandwiches aren't ready yet."

"Oh, gee! I can't play croquet in my own yard, and I can't have anything to eat in my own house. Come on, Jerry," he started off, with an angry swing. "Let's you and I go over to Poppy Ott's house. For a guy can have a little fun over there."

There was a whole row of motor cars in front of Red's house. For half the women in town had turned out to the important club meeting. And just as we came to the street, another car drove up.

"Pappy!" called a shrill nervous voice. "Be careful what you're doing. Goodness me! You almost bumped into that telephone pole that time."

"Well, now, ma," drawled the stooped old man at the wheel, "don't you go yellin' at me that way, an' git me all flustered. Fur you know I hain't had no practice lately. So quit yellin' at me, or I'll jest be all the worse."

Red and I watched, grinning, as the car stopped jerkily and a trim neatly-dressed little old lady got out.

"What's the matter with it, Pappy?" she turned displeased to the driver. "For it didn't used to jump at every telephone pole that way."

"Well," drawled the old man, "you must recollect, ma, that I hain't had it out before fur fifteen years. An' everything's kinda rusty, I reckon. But I got you here all right. I didn't bump into that telyphone pole nuther, like you

thought I would. So don't you go frettin' none."

Someone had told me one time about this old car. It was one of the oldest in the state, according to report. But I never had seen it before. And no wonder, if it hadn't been out of the barn for the last fifteen years! Boy!—I didn't know how much older than that it was. But it sure was an old-timer, all right.

In backing around, to leave, the old man knocked over Red's hitching post.

"Oh, Pappy!" cried the flustered little old lady, with a worried air. "Now just see what you've done."

The old man managed to bring the car to a standstill. But with the motor still going it acted as though any minute it would either jump forward or backward, like a scared jackrabbit. And *noisy!* Wough! The motor was up under the front seat. We could see the bottom of the balance wheel going around. And every time it turned over it shook the crazy-looking car from one end to the other.

"What's that, ma?" the old man called, as the motor kept on banging away like a cyclone in a dish-pan factory. "What'd you say to me?"

"You knocked over the hitching post," the old lady screeched.

"What's that?" screeched the old man, cupping his ear. "Speak louder, ma."

"The hitching post," she got up as high as she could. "Don't you see?—you knocked it over."

"Knocked what over?"

She gave up then, exhausted.

"Oh, dear me!" she spoke to us despairingly. "I never realized what an old rattletrap that car was, or I never would have insisted on Pappy getting it out this afternoon to bring me here. And now, I suppose, he'll knock a house down, or something, before he gets home with it."

Pappy and Granny Paisley are two of the finest old people in the whole town. Everybody loves them, though it's said sometimes that she scolds too much. They live opposite Poppy Ott, on Elm Street, in a rambling old-fashioned steep-roofed house. So I knew them well.

Pappy set the brakes and got out.

"Pshaw!" says he, troubled, when he saw the broken hitching post. "Now I sartinly never intended to do that. Did I, ma?"

"Of course you didn't, Pappy. But now that it's done, you better come back some time and fix it. For you can't go 'round upsetting people's hitching posts that way without fixing them up again."

"Yes, yes, of course," waggled the old man. "I'll come back an' fix it."

"Oh, that's all right," grinned Red, as he gave the broken post an indifferent kick. "Nobody ever used it anyway, so just forget about it. But I tell you what you *can* do, if you want to," he added eagerly. "You can give us a ride over to Poppy Ott's house."

The old man got back in his seat.

"All right," says he, motioning us in. "Jump

right in, boys, an' we'll be there in a jiffy."

So Red and I piled hilariously into the back seat.

"And did you know," says he, "that the Paisleys had an old car like this?"

"Yes, I'd heard about it, but never thought I'd be lucky enough to get a ride in it."

We had to yell to make each other hear, for the old motor was whoopety-banging it louder than ever now.

"I'd like to own it," screeched Red.

"Yes, that would be fun," I screeched back.

"Pappy!" the old lady came running, as we started off. "Pappy! Wait!"

"Whoo-o!" says the old man, as he pressed with his feet and pulled on the steering-wheel column. "Whoo-o there, Samantha Jane! An' what is it you want, ma?"

"Now, don't you forget what I told you," she laid it off to him with a stiff finger, in her usual sharp way. "I want you to drive careful going home. And when you get the car put up, you go right back to the store. Do you hear me? And for goodness' sake, Pappy!—don't just set there all the afternoon either and swat flies. Get up and do something. For you've let things pile up down there till it's the most untidy place I ever saw in all my life. I'm ashamed to go down there any more. And I want you to get busy this afternoon and do something about it."

The old man tipped back his shabby cap and scratched his gray head.

"But, ma, don't you think I ought to stay home an' help the Otts move?" he asked gravely. "Fur they've always helped us, you know. An' I think we ought to be neighborly an' help them in return. Besides, Mr. Ott hisself won't be able to leave the factory this afternoon, where he works."

"But he arranged for a drayman to help Poppy, for Poppy told me so himself. You'd just be in the way. So you go on down to the store, like I say. And, Pappy," she concluded, less sharp now and more beseeching, "for goodness' sake *do* try and bring home some money this afternoon. For if you don't, I don't for the life of me know what we're going to eat on next week."

"All right, ma," waggled the old man. "All right—jest as you say. I'll see that everything's straightened up down there good an' proper. I'll bring home some money too."

And off we went down the street.

"Did you hear that?" I yelled to Red.

"Hear what?" he yelled back.

"She said Poppy's going to move. Did you know that?"

"No. But quit jiggling. What's the matter with you anyway?—got ants in your pants?"

"Quit jiggling yourself," I told him.

Pappy heard us, and turned.

"Ol' Samantha Jane always was an awful jiggler," he yelled back to us, as we tore along at the tremendous speed of six miles an hour. "One

time ma even had her false teeth shook out. But ol' Samantha's a good car, jest the same."

"When did you buy it?" yelled Red, still jiggling.

"Oh, 'bout twenty-six years ago."

A big moving van loomed up ahead.

"Hey! Look out!" I screeched, bracing myself for the expected crash. But Pappy zipped around it by a hair.

"What's that?" he yelled, as we whizzed on, with the people staring from both sidewalks and a whole flock of kids taking in noisily behind us. "What'd you say, Jerry?"

"Never mind," says I weakly.

Instead of turning to the right at the corner of Elm Street, as I expected, the old man kept straight on.

"Aren't you going home?" I yelled.

"Sure thing," he yelled back. "But I got to go 'round the block to the left. Fur ol' Samantha Jane don't turn to the right very good. An' the only way to git along with her is to humor her."

"Some car!" laughed Red.

But we finally wound up at the right place, after a lot of left-hand turns. And thanking the old man for the exciting ride, we ran across the street to Poppy's house.

CHAPTER II

IN POPPY'S ATTIC

POPPY had a whole bunch of furniture piled in the middle of the parlor floor when we tumbled in.

"But I didn't know you were going to move," I told him.

He was looking kind of glum.

"I didn't know it myself," says he, "till day before yesterday."

Red and I were both born in Tutter, Illinois, where we've lived on Main Street all our life. But Poppy was born down in Tennessee, where he lived in the mountains till he was thirteen. It was there that he lost his mother. He was pretty poor and shabby when he first came to our little town with his father. But when a kid's a good kid you can tell it, even when he's in rags. So I wasn't long warming up to old Poppy. And when I came to know him better I found out that he was one of the smartest and squarest kids that ever walked around on two legs.

"But what are you moving for?" I now asked him. "I thought you liked it here."

"I do," says he, as he went on with his work. "And so does pa."

"Then what are you moving for?"

"Because we've got to," he growled. "We've been ordered out."

"Oh, oh!" says Red, standing by with an impish grin. "Forgot to pay your rent, huh?—and got ordered out."

"Oh, don't be silly," snorted Poppy. "Of course we paid the rent, and always have for that matter. We'd buy the place too if we could get it, but old Truman Sweet won't sell it to us. And he says we've got to be out by to-night or he'll bring the law around and put us out."

Which, I thought, was a queer thing for Truman Sweet to say. For he has the reputation of being the greediest money grabber in the whole town. I never thought myself, from what I'd seen of him, that he'd turn down money that way, or put out any of his tenants if they paid their rent.

Tall and skinny, with shrewd squinting eyes and a constant greedy look, he thinks his money gives him great importance. And that kid of his—Sweet William, we call him—is just like him. They say the Sweet kid lied about his age when he first got a driver's permit, but I guess he's old enough to drive now, for he's at it enough. The girls giggle around him, for rides in his father's car. But you can bet your boots that *I* never giggle around him—the big pansy! Every time I meet him I feel like flopping a hunk of nice gooey mud in his face. For I haven't forgotten how he used to catch me, when I was a

little kid, and twist my arms just to make me scream with pain. Once he messed me up with nasty old black tar, getting it all over my clothes and in my hair. That time my pa indignantly took sides with me, though usually he lets me fight my own battles. He and old Sweet had a hot argument over it, I guess, for no one could ever tell Truman Sweet anything against that precious little kid of his.

"But if you kept the rent paid up all right," I spoke to Poppy, puzzled by what he had told me, "what got into Sweet to put you out? That doesn't make sense to me."

"He says he's going to sell the place—and he wants us to get out so he can fix it up. But when we offered to buy it ourselves, just as it stands, he hemmed and hawed around, saying he didn't want to sell it that quick. Which convinces me, Jerry, that there's a nigger in the fence. And I can tell you why too."

"Why?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes," Red chimed in, "tell us why, Poppy."

"Well, did you fellows ever notice the roof outside? It's got holes in it as big as hickory nuts, and we've been after him for months to fix it. But he wouldn't even come around to look at it. Then all of a sudden he came tearing over here the other day, as though he'd just found out that the roof was leaking, and had me get him a stepladder so he could climb up through that trapdoor in the kitchen ceiling, to look at it."

"And then what?" says I eagerly.

"Well, he went all over up there with a flash-light. And when he came down he asked me if I had taken any old wall-paper out of there. He never said a word about the roof, till I asked him if he'd marked the holes so a carpenter could patch them from the outside. He said then there weren't any holes—and told me sharply to keep out of there."

"Gee!" says I, getting excited. "Maybe he hid something up there."

"Yes," Red chimed in. "Had you thought of that, Poppy?"

"I'd sooner think," says Poppy, in that far-seeing way of his, "that he was up there looking for something. And I think that has something to do with him ordering us out too. I bet you a cookie, fellows, that the minute we're out he'll be over here searching the house from top to bottom. For it looks to me as though he's just found out that there's something hidden here, and he wants us to get out so he can find it."

"What do you think it is?" I asked excitedly. "Money?"

"Yes, or something just as good as money. For it sure has him excited. And there's nothing he likes better than money."

Red ran to the kitchen.

"Let's all go up," says he eagerly, looking up at the opening. "For if there's money here, maybe we can find it."

"I couldn't, when I looked," says Poppy. "And I searched high and low up there."

"Maybe he found it himself," says I.

"I hardly think so, Jerry, or he wouldn't insist on us getting out. Besides, he's been over here a dozen times the last few days, poking through that old wall-paper up there. And he wouldn't keep coming that way if he'd found it."

"What old wall-paper are you talking about?" I asked quickly.

For that's the second time he had mentioned it.

"It's some that was left over and put up there when the house was papered years ago. But I never touched it, as I told him. And then do you know what he did?—the slick old fox!"

"What?" Red and I asked together.

"He said he didn't care particularly about the old wall-paper. He said he couldn't imagine why he ever mentioned it to me—wanting to get the thought of wall-paper out of my mind, of course! He tried to make me think that all he went up in the attic for was to inspect the roof. It *did* have a few holes in it, he finally admitted. And then's when he told us to get out—so that he could put a new roof on the house, he said, and get it all fixed up for some buyer."

"But he wouldn't sell it to you and your pa, huh?"

"No. And I don't think he intends selling it to anybody right away. That was just an excuse of his to get us out of here, so he could search undisturbed."

"Let's go up, Jerry," Red suggested again.

"Can we?" I asked Poppy.

"Sure thing, if you want to," says he, as he went on with his work. "But I'm too busy to go up myself. Anyway I've seen everything I care to see up there."

So Red and I got a stepladder and went up. It was a dark cobwebby place. And, say!—I wish you could have seen that roof! It was like a sieve. And yet old Sweet had told Poppy at first that the roof was all right. He sure was up to something, all right.

Red poked around with a flashlight.

"Here's a pile of old paper," says he, kicking it.

"I bet it's that old wall-paper that Poppy told us about," says I quickly.

"But what's it all unrolled for? Look at it, Jerry! It's all wadded in a pile."

"Well, you know what Poppy said. He thinks old Sweet was up here searching for something. And he probably unrolled the wall-paper to see if there was anything hidden in it."

"He must be crazy," grunted Red. "For I never heard of anybody looking for hidden money in old wall-paper."

"Well, let's look around," says I excitedly. "For if the money wasn't in the wall-paper, maybe we can find it some place else."

But our search was stopped there by a sudden sharp rap on the door below.

"Suffering cats!" jumped Red, his eyes bulging. "Maybe that's the old skinflint now."

CHAPTER III

POPPY MOVES OUT

THERE was too much of a chance of it being old Sweet at the door for us to stay in the attic. So we piled down quickly. And not wanting the ladder to give us away, I pitched it down the cellar stairs, thinking all the time that Poppy was on his way to the front door to answer the rap.

But no sooner had the ladder left my hands than there was a wild gurgling screech below, followed by a shattering crash.

"What was that?" says Red, pop-eyed.

"It sounded like Poppy," says I, aghast.

"Good night nurse!" squawked Red. "You don't suppose you socked the poor guy with the ladder, did you?"

"Poppy!" I called weakly down the cellar stairs. "Is that you, Poppy?"

"You're durn tootin' it's me," he bellowed, and up the stairs he came, the maddest kid you ever set eyes on in all your born days. For I had caught him halfway up the stairs with a big crock of mustard pickles in his arms, and now he was covered with mustard from head to foot.

"Who threw that ladder at me?" he bellowed, like a mad bull, as he clawed the mustard pickles out of his eyes.

"I did," I told him faintly. "But gosh, Poppy——"

"Oh, it was *you,* huh?" he roared. "Well, you're going to get a punch in the jaw for that, you big smart aleck. For you ought to know better than to sock a guy in the stomach with a stepladder when he's carrying a crock of mustard pickles around."

"Mustard pickles?" says Red, letting out his neck.

And then he giggled!

"Yes," bellowed Poppy, turning on the giggler with increasing fury, "and *you'll* get a sock in the jaw too, you baboon-faced hyena, if you don't quit that giggling."

He went to the sink then, to wash himself. But when I followed to help him, he kicked me off.

"But, gosh, Poppy!" I told him, genuinely distressed. "I didn't know you were down there. I thought you had gone to the door to let old Sweet in. Honest I did, Poppy. Gee! I wouldn't hit you with a stepladder on purpose."

"Well, after this," he growled, getting his temper in hand, "take a look before you go heaving stepladders around, and see where you're heaving them."

"Anyway," giggled Red, "you've got plenty of

pickles handy for supper. For all you've got to do is reach up in your hair."

"I still don't understand what you pitched that ladder at me for," Poppy growled.

"We thought old Sweet was coming," I told him.

"And so you tried to brain me with the ladder, huh? Boy!—that *was* bright. You ought to go to the head of the class seven times for that."

Red giggled.

"A pickle a day," says he, stepping around pleasantly, "keeps the doctor away."

"If you don't shut up," Poppy bellowed at him, "I'll take you down cellar and rub your nose in it."

"Oh, don't mind him," says I soothingly. "Here!—let me help wipe the back of your neck."

"Yes—get a mop," tittered Red.

"Of all the nasty messes!" Poppy growled. "And look at my shirt!"

"All you need is a tin can wrapped around you," chirped Red, "and you could pass for a mustard sardine."

There was another knock at the front door.

"Go see who it is," I told Red, impatient with him, "and quit running off at the mouth."

He came back with Pappy Paisley.

"I was jest beginnin' to think," says the old man, in his pleasant way, "that there wasn't anybody at home."

"Did you want something?" Poppy asked, a bit shortly.

"Yes—I was jest wonderin' if I could borry a small monkeywrench from you to tighten up ol' Samantha Jane around the carburetor. Fur I jest discovered that she's leakin' gasoline, an' I can't afford that." Then he sniffed. "But what's that spicey smell?" he quizzed.

"Oh," tittered Red, "we just had a mustard-pickle shower down in the cellar, and Poppy forgot to put up his umbrella."

"Goodness me!" says the old man gravely, as he looked Poppy over. "Did you git it all over you? My, my!"

"No," snorted Poppy, "I just got it from the ankles up—that's all."

Then he got out a box of tools.

"Why don't you take them all over," he suggested. "For they're all going over to your house anyway, as soon as the drayman gets here."

"And what did you mean by that?" I asked Poppy, when the old man had shuffled off with the tools, Red following. "Are you and your pa going to live over there in part of their house?"

"It's the only place we could find on such short notice."

"Then you and your pa won't have to do any more cooking, huh?"

"Why, of course we will. For we're going to have our own rooms. We're going to have the north side of the house and Pappy and his wife are going to keep the south side for themselves."

"I thought maybe you were all going to live together."

"That's what Granny Paisley wanted us to do at first. But she's so old!—we don't want her to wait on us that way."

"And did you know," I laughed, "that she had Pappy take her over to the club meeting this afternoon in their old car?"

"Yes, I saw them start out. And didn't she look sweet, Jerry, in that old-fashioned silk dress of hers, and that funny little lace parasol? Gee! I think she's dandy. But she sure can lay down the law to old Pappy all right. Oh, oh! You'd think at times she was going to bite his head off. But at heart she's the gentlest old soul that ever lived."

"Say, Poppy," says I earnestly, "let me ask you something. Do you think Pappy Paisley makes any money in that old paint store of his?"

"Well, now that you've asked me," says Poppy, with equal earnestness, "I'll tell you the truth about it: He doesn't make enough money down there to pay the rent."

"That's just what I thought," says I, nodding, "from something I overheard Granny Paisley tell him this afternoon."

"The wonder is to me," says Poppy, "that Truman Sweet hasn't closed them out long before this, for his back rent."

"And does he own that place too?" says I, surprised. "Boy!—he must own half the town."

"As I understand it," says Poppy, "Sweet's

father used to be a partner in the paint business. It was Paisley and Sweet then. And that's when they made money. But things started going bad. Then old Jonathan Sweet died. And in settling up, his heirs got the store building and Pappy got the stock."

"And that's when Pappy bought the old car, huh?—when he was making money."

"Yes—and guess what he paid for it, Jerry."

"A hundred dollars?"

"Aw, come on now! Make a real guess. Don't be a piker. Remember, he bought it new."

"Two hundred dollars?"

"Yes, multiplied by seven."

"You don't mean fourteen hundred dollars?" I cried, amazed.

"Nothing else but. For you must remember that car was all hand made. And it was some attraction, I'll say, when it first came to town."

"It still is," I laughed, as I thought of our exciting ride home, with the kids yapping behind us.

While we were talking, young Sweet drove up in front with the family car and got out, a couple of giggling girls tagging him as usual.

Poppy's face darkened.

"Now, I wonder what *he* wants," he growled.

"You'll soon find out," says I. "For here he comes up the walk. And look at him strut! Boy!—you'd think he owned the earth."

"Yes," growled Poppy, "if there ever was a chip of the old block, he's it."

"Or a slice of the old cheese."

"I dare you to tell him that," grinned Poppy.

"Well, I'm not afraid to," I growled.

One of the gigglers got her eyes on a flower bed beside the front porch.

"Oh, look, Wilsie!" she cried. "See the pretty flowers. Aren't they gorgeous."

Wilsie! That was a new one.

"Did you hear that?" I asked Poppy, disgusted.

"Yes, but pain-in-the-neck would be a better name for *him.*"

"The girls like him because he dresses up all the time, and has a car."

"Well, that doesn't make him any better than anyone else," growled Poppy. "And he needn't think he can swagger in here and start giving orders."

"Can we pick some of the flowers, Wilsie?" the girl asked.

"Oh, sure," says Big Stuff, with a lordly gesture. "Just help yourself."

Then in he walked without rapping.

"Just a minute," says Poppy quickly, "and I'll show you how to do it." Going out, he rapped on the door, saying: "Good afternoon, Mr. Ott. Could I come in a few minutes?" "Oh, certainly, Mr. Sweet. Come right in."

"And what's the matter with you?" stared Sweet. "Are you crazy?"

"I was just showing you how to do it."

"How to do what?"

"Enter a strange house politely. For you haven't got any right to walk right in here without rapping."

"Oh, phooey on you!"

"What do you want anyway?"

"My father sent me over here to see that you didn't take any of our stuff when you moved out," the kid told us, in his overbearing way.

"Well, you better go back and tell your father to mind his own business," flared Poppy. "For I guess I know what to take and what not to. And maybe you better have him teach you some manners about flowers too."

"What do you mean by that?" Sweet William stiffened.

"You haven't any right to come in here and pick my flowers without asking for them, or give them away."

"*Your* flowers!" the visitor sneered superiorly. "Listen, lug!—you seem to forget who owns this place. You're talking out of turn, renter."

"Just the same," says Poppy, "they're my flowers, for I planted them out there."

"It's our ground, and everything that grows here is ours."

"And I suppose," says Poppy, "if I rented a farm from you, and raised a crop of corn, it'd be your corn—just because you owned the land."

"There's a big difference between corn and flowers."

"Yes," says Poppy, "and there's a big differ-

ence—or at least you *think* there is—between your rights and mine. Just because your old man's rich, you think you've got the right to run over others. But you can't run over me. And if you ever come in my house again, without rapping, I'll throw you out."

Gee! Poppy was standing right up to him now. I thought sure there'd be a fight. And, boy!—was I excited. For I've told you what I think of Bill Sweet, and I couldn't think of anything sweller now than to have Poppy take him down and wipe up the floor with him.

"Go for him, Poppy," I egged, dancing around. "Smack him one on the kisser. Give him the old Tennessee right hook, Poppy."

Sweet backed up, whitening around the mouth.

"If you dare to lay a finger on me," he told Poppy, "I'll have my father run you out of town."

"Go on, Poppy!" I further danced around. "Go on and crack him one."

"You ought to be run out of town anyway," Sweet added sneeringly, gaining courage as Poppy held off. "For all you are is a tramp."

Boy!—I thought sure he'd get it then. But Poppy just laughed it off.

"Do you know," says he, looking at Sweet kind of tolerant-like, "I actually feel sorry for you. For there's an awful lot you don't know, outside of the fact that you're rich."

"Well, I know what you looked like when you

first came to town," Sweet came back as mean acting as he could. "I haven't forgotten that."

"Sure thing," Poppy spoke pleasantly. "I was dressed in rags, wasn't I? I didn't even have a cap or socks. But what of it?"

"They should 'a' run you out of town then, and your old man too," yelled Sweet, furious because he couldn't make Poppy act ashamed. "They never should 'a' let you stay here. For this is no tramp's roost."

I couldn't stand any more of that.

"Oh, Poppy!" I cried, dancing. "Why don't you sock him? Why do you let him talk to you that way? Where's your grit? Gosh, Poppy! Why don't you go for him?"

"He isn't hurting me, Jerry," Poppy spoke quietly.

Sweet backed off sneeringly.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he laughed, in his hateful way, as he went out.

"And now he'll tell around that you backed down," I told Poppy resentfully.

"Well, what of it?" said Poppy.

"But you should have knocked his block off," I yelled at him, out of patience with him. "For gosh sakes! What's the matter with you anyway? I didn't think you'd stand there and let him call you a tramp right to your face. I thought you had more grit than that."

"But I was a tramp, Jerry, when I first came to town, and so was pa. We've never tried to deny it."

"Oh, gee!" I growled, in despair. "I don't know what's the matter with you. You didn't used to be like that."

"Listen, Jerry," he laughed softly. "There's no disgrace in being a tramp, if you get wise in time and quit it. The disgrace is where you just stay what you are, and don't try to be anything better. As for *him!*—I meant it when I said I was sorry for him. For look what he is! Who'd want to be like him? He doesn't even know that he's living in a free country, where all boys have an equal chance to make good. He thinks because he's rich that he's got a better chance than me, and others like me. But he's just fooling himself, Jerry."

"Just the same," says I doggedly, "I think you should have cracked him once anyway."

"Well, hold your horses," laughed Poppy. And this time I detected something deep and determined in his laugh. "I have a hunch that some day I *will* take a crack at that bird, but it's going to be over something more important than this. I'm a tramp, huh? Say!—that makes me laugh. For I'd rather be a tramp any day in the week, than a brainless snob like him."

Red and Pappy came over, when the dray came at four o'clock, to help us load up. And all the time we were carrying stuff out, young Sweet stood around with his neck stretched.

"And are you all through now?" he asked meanly, when we finished.

We knew what he was there for. His father

had sent him over to keep us out of the attic. And now Poppy thought he'd have some fun with him.

"I wonder, Jerry," says he, with a sly wink, "if we got everything down out of the attic."

"Let's take a look," says I, winking back.

Sweet saw us coming with the ladder.

"Say!—what are you guys bringing that ladder back for?" he demanded.

"We just wanted to make sure," says Poppy, "that we hadn't left anything up in the attic."

"Well, you better keep out of that attic," Sweet spoke excitedly, "if you know what's good for you. For my father don't want you snooping around up there—and you know it too."

"What's the matter?" Poppy laughed shrewdly. "Have you and your father got something hidden up there that you don't want us to see?"

"No, there isn't anything *hidden* up there," the kid denied, flushing. "But you better keep out of there, if you know what's good for you. And now, if you're all through in here, I wish you'd get out, so I can lock up."

"All right," laughed Poppy, turning with the ladder to go out. "The house is all yours now, attic and all. So hunt to your heart's content."

"Hunt for what?" Sweet asked, reddening.

"Bedbugs," says Poppy.

And how he laughed as we drove off. For young Sweet stood glaring after us mad enough to bite ten-penny nails.

CHAPTER IV

DECORATING PLANS

MOTHER knew, at supper, that I had been working hard. For I ate twice as much as usual.

"But why did the Otts take such a sudden notion to move?" says she curiously, when I had told her what I had been doing. "For I always thought, from what Poppy said, that he and his father liked it over there—though it certainly wasn't much of a house."

"They did like it," says I. "But they had to move just the same. For old Sweet ordered them out."

"Not *old* Sweet, Jerry," Mother reproved. "You should call him Mr. Sweet."

"He's an old cheat," I growled.

"Well, we won't argue that," Mother spoke dryly. "But just the same it'll sound better if you call him Mr. Sweet. For it isn't nice for children to speak that way of their elders."

I told her then about the old wall-paper in the attic, and our suspicions about it.

"But if Mr. Sweet thinks there's money hidden there," says she thoughtfully, "why didn't he

start searching for it years ago, before the Otts moved in?"

"We think he just found out about it."

"Found out how?"

"Well, gosh!—we don't *know*. It's just our idea. But he never came around before, except to get the rent. Then all of a sudden he started running over there every fifteen minutes or so, to rummage around in the attic. And when we were moving out this afternoon, that kid of his was there. He said his father sent him over to see that we didn't run off with any of their stuff. But what he really was sent over there for was to spy on us, and see that we didn't go up in the attic. So we're pretty sure, all right, that there's something hidden up there."

"Well," Mother gave her opinion, "there may be some mystery connected with the old wall-paper, but I hardly think it's money, Jerry, as you boys think. For I can't imagine who'd hide money in an old house like that. For it's one of the shabbiest places in the town."

"I don't think it's so awfully shabby," says I loyally.

And yet I knew all the time that it was. For not only was the house small and squatty, with a low roof ending in back at a woodshed, but it leaned over, it was so old and rickety, and every window in it had a different tilt to it. The inside walls were all bumpy, where they had been plastered over and over again in spots, and if water was spilt on the floor it always ran one way or

another, showing how humpy and uneven the floor was. Mr. Ott had taken the place when he first came to town. He hardly had a dollar then. So naturally he had to take what he could get. But he and Poppy had been very happy there with their few belongings, which had been added to from time to time, and as Poppy's best pal I had been happy with them. That's why I stuck up for the old place now.

Red breezed in at seven o'clock, to get me to go to the picture show with him. But I told him on the way down town that I had promised Poppy to come back there after supper, if I wasn't too tired. So we separated in front of the picture theatre. And when I came to the corner of Elm Street, where I was to turn to go south to Poppy's house, what do you know if that smart aleck of a Sweet kid didn't swing up beside me, in his car, and sock me in the face with a rotten tomato, jeering as he did it, in that hateful way of his, and then driving off before I could get a chance to revenge myself.

It's an awful surprise to a fellow to be walking along, thinking quietly to himself, and suddenly get a mess like that flopped in his face. It almost knocked me off my feet. And *stink?* Man, oh, man! I always had the idea, till then, that a tomato was a more refined sort of vegetable, and not to be compared with an onion or a rotten cabbage head. But that old tomato, let me tell you, had sunk so low that it out-stunk any onion or cabbage that ever grew. Even a self-respect-

ing skunk would have walked by it with tilted nose.

I simply can't bear that Sweet kid, as I say. He's a pain in the neck to me. And if he had fired even a decent tomato at me I would have fought him to a finish. But to get a stinking mess like *that* flopped at me, and no chance then to get even! Gr-r-r! But I'd get even with him later on, I told myself grimly, as I wiped up as best I could with my handkerchief. And I'd get even with him good and plenty too. Instead of one tomato, he'd get a dozen, just as stinking, and he'd get them when he was all dressed up too, and ready to step out with his best girl. Nor I didn't care a rap either what his rich father said or did about it. For I had just as much right to smear him as he had to smear me.

But wasn't he a sneaking coward though, to smear a guy that way without any good reason! —for what I had said to him that afternoon, when he and Poppy were hotly facing each other, wasn't enough to justify a smeary attack like that. He just hated me, and Poppy too, because we wouldn't buckle down to him, and took advantage of every chance like this to show his hatred.

But mad as I was at the start, I was pretty well cooled off by the time I got to Poppy's house. For it doesn't pay a kid to get mad that way and stay mad. I knew what I was going to do later! So the thing to do now, I figured, was to get that tomato stink washed off, and just wait

my chance. But it was well for young Sweet, let me tell you, that he hadn't stayed there to jeer at me when he smeared me, or I would have socked him with a rock, windshield or no windshield, just as sure as shootin'.

Poppy was hanging up a picture when I got there, and Mr. Ott, with his bookcase handy, already was buried in one of his beloved books, evidently as well contented here as he had been across the street. He sits and reads that way every night, when he isn't playing chess with some crony, or working overtime in his stilt factory, and once he gets his nose in a book I honestly believe that we could tear the house down from over his head without him hearing us, or objecting.

My shirt was so messy that I hated to put it on again after washing. So Poppy got me one of his. And feeling much better now, I followed him outside, where he told me, with a funny laugh, that he had a new job.

"What kind of a job?" says I.

"I'm going to be a draper," says he.

"A what?" says I.

"A draper."

"Spell it."

"D-r-a-p-e-r."

"And I still don't know what you mean," I told him.

"I didn't either," he laughed, in that jolly way of his that makes him so likeable, "till Granny Paisley explained it to me. But that's what

Pappy Paisley is. And that's what I'm going to be. For I'm going to work for him, Jerry."

"Work for him where?—in the paint store?"

"Yes. I hired out to him to-night."

"But I thought you told me," says I, "that they didn't sell enough stuff down there to pay the store rent. So how can they afford to pay you anything?"

"But we expect to do considerably better from now on, Jerry," he spoke confidently.

"Did you say *we?*" I asked pointedly, cocking an eye at him.

"Of course. For clerks always say 'we,' don't they, when they work in a store? And that's what I'm going to be—the head clerk."

"There's some joke about it," says I. For he was telling it in a sort of laughing way.

"What's the matter?" he grinned broadly. "Don't you think I'll make a good draper?"

"There you go again," says I. "What are you talking about anyway?"

"Well, listen, Jerry," he sobered. "Here's how it happened: When Granny Paisley came home to-night, from the club meeting, she jumped on poor Pappy something awful—though, of course, she didn't mean half she said. But like I told you this afternoon, they're just about on the rocks—the two of them. The poor old lady hardly knows from day to day where their next meal is coming from. So I knew how discouraged and desperate she felt when she came home and found Pappy tinkering their old

car. For she had told him to go down to the store."

"Yes, I know—I heard her tell him that. And he promised to do it too."

"Well, I felt partly to blame—for you know how he pitched in this afternoon, when we were moving, and helped us carry stuff. He helped us load up across the street, and when we got here he helped us unload again. I didn't like to see him get jawed at, after helping us that way. And when I found out that he was supposed to go to the store and straighten it up, so they'd be able to sell a little something, I told Granny I'd go down with him to-morrow and help him, to sort of pay him back for helping me. And it was then that she told me, as she sat and cried about their misfortunes, how he used to go all over this part of the country, to Chicago even and to Peoria and to all the other big cities, hanging people's drapes. He was the best draper outside of New York City, she said, and he was just as good at selecting wall-paper shades too. It was him, she said, that built up the business years ago. For all his partner did was work in the store and keep books. Then the partner died, like I told you this afternoon."

"You mean Jonathan Sweet?"

"Yes, but I was wrong, Jerry, about Truman Sweet getting the store building. You know, we couldn't understand how he'd let the rent go so long—for it's up to six hundred dollars now. Well, it wasn't Truman Sweet who got the store

building at all, but his brother Martin—an old bachelor living out in the country. Granny Paisley told me all about it this evening—and she almost cried her eyes out, Jerry. For she said that she lived in constant fear that Martin Sweet would attach their stock, for the back rent, and put them out of business. But I guess he's a much kinder man than his brother. For the store's still running. And now, if we can get straightened up down there, so the store looks like something, maybe we can do some business. Gee! It's going to be a lot of fun, Jerry, getting the place in order and putting on sales. For I always did want to run a store like that."

"For Pete's sake!" I squawked. "Pappy and Granny better look out, or the first thing they know they won't have any business left. For first you talk about going down there to help straighten it up, and now you talk about running it."

"We've got it all arranged," says Poppy, stepping around with a big air. "I'm going to help Pappy the rest of the summer, and in return he's going to teach me to drape."

"Drape what?" says I, beginning to lose patience with him. "Why don't you tell me what you're talking about?"

"Well, you know what a drape is, don't you?"

"No."

"But didn't you ever notice those little cloth curtains over your mother's windows?"

"Sure."

"Well, those are drapes. And that's what I'm going to learn—to make them and put them up."

"Oh!—a dressmaker, huh?" I grinned.

But I learned from him that a professional draper was a great deal more than a dressmaker, for it took great skill and expert knowledge to design and hang the expensive drapes used by millionaires in their mansions. In places like that the window and door drapes had to be just right. The color and design had to be right, to harmonize with the walls and woodwork, and when the draper put them up they had to be folded just so-so, right down to a hair. It was an art, especially when it came to the hanging. And it was because Pappy Paisley could do it so much better than even the most skillful drapers in the city, that he used to get so many calls from there.

"But if Pappy is such a wonderful draper as you say," I cut into the story, "why doesn't he do more of that work now, instead of fiddling away his time in that old paint store of his?"

"Draperies and wall-paper go together," Poppy explained, having gotten it all from Granny herself. "And that's how Pappy's business got such a good start. For he not only got the drapery orders from his rich customers, but he sold them wall-paper to match, and paint."

"And do you mean to tell me," says I, hardly able to swallow the story, "that the rich Chicago people used to come down here, years ago, to buy their wall-paper?"

"I didn't say they actually came down here themselves," says Poppy. "But it's Granny's story that Pappy used to go up there, good and plenty, and at good pay too."

"But if he was so good at it, why didn't he keep it up?"

"He got too old for it. It was hard for him to get up and down ladders. The noise in the cities made him nervous too. He got so he hated to go there—was even afraid to go. And finally he gave it up, depending entirely on his sales in the store."

"And you think you're going to take his place, huh?" says I curiously.

"No, Jerry," Poppy spoke soberly. "I don't think anybody could do that. For the thing that made him so good at it was born in him. I haven't got that. But he's a nice old man. Granny's nice too. They've both done a lot for me since I've been living on this street, and now I'm going to see if I can't do something for them."

"But you don't really expect to be a draper, do you?" I pinned him down. "For I thought you told me one time that you were going to be a banker."

"I am. But they can't pay me in money, Jerry," he confided, "for they haven't any. And Granny wouldn't consent a minute to let me work down there for nothing. So I told them if they'd teach me a little draping it'd be all right."

Poppy's a swell kid that way. He's never so

happy as when he's helping someone else, especially old people in trouble. And while I couldn't picture him chasing up to Chicago to sell draperies and interior decorations, as had been done before in the early days of the store, I still had the feeling that he'd be able to help the run-down old business a lot.

And figuring that there'd be a lot of fun in it, as well as satisfaction, I decided to pitch in and help him all I could.

CHAPTER V

DETECTING

WHILE we were talking, in the fast darkening yard—for it was after eight now—a familiar gaunt sly-moving figure came into sight on the opposite side of the street, and turned in. It was old Truman Sweet, with a stepladder, coming for his first real search for the hidden money.

Poppy jumped into action.

"Say, Jerry," says he excitedly, "have you got a lot of grit?"

"That all depends on what you call a lot," I spoke guardedly.

For with old Sweet slipping around that way, like a greased snake, and the spooky night shadows creeping in on us, I felt kind of shaky. And I'm not ashamed to admit it.

"Do you think you've got enough grit to climb up on the roof over there?" says Poppy.

"Oh, oh!" I croaked, suddenly feeling faint. "I think I better go home to mamma."

"But wouldn't you like to see what he's doing in the attic, Jerry? For you know very well what he brought that stepladder along for."

"Yes, I'd like to see him," says I, "but I'd hate like the dickens to have him see me."

"But if we hurry and get up on the roof ahead of him," Poppy spoke quickly, "he'll never know we're there. And by peeking through the roof holes, we can see everything he does. Are you game, Jerry?"

"All right," I gave in. "But let's not take any crazy chances, Poppy."

"We won't," he promised faithfully.

So over the fence we piled, him leading.

Old Sweet had a light inside now. And as we hurried around the house, to the place where we were going to climb up, we could see him setting the ladder under the attic door.

"Hurry!" says Poppy, in a low panting voice, as he boosted me onto the woodshed. In turn, I helped him up. Then, as easily and as quietly as we could, we climbed up the roof.

"So far so good," says Poppy, when we got to the peak.

The trapdoor was opening just below us. We could hear it. And we could see specks of light through the rotted shingles.

"Now," breathed Poppy, "pick out a good hole and watch."

There was a good-sized hole just a few inches from me. So I edged over, and watching, with one eye, I saw the wolfish old geezer come up into the attic, wheezing, and start to work.

He had been all through the old wall-paper before. But he went through it again, with his

long boney twitching fingers, not only trying to shake something out of it, but looking it all over for possible marks of some kind. But evidently his greedy search was wasted. For he finally pushed the wall-paper aside, with an angry gesture, and started pulling up the floor boards, in further determined search.

Poppy reached over and touched me in the dark.

"What's the matter?" I breathed, anxious.

"I think we'll soon see something now," says he confidently.

But we didn't—at least, not what we expected. Sweet worked till he had every floor board up. But there was nothing under them, except a collection of dust and scooting spiders.

He went all around the attic after that, tapping the walls with a hammer, and pulling everything loose that he could. But still his feverish search brought no results.

He mumbled considerably to himself as he worked, expressing greedy hope, as he pried up each new floor board, and then sour disappointment at finding nothing there. But he didn't say enough to give himself away. And when he finally gave up the search, and went below, we still didn't know for sure what he was after.

Was he crazy? I began to wonder. For what he was doing was kind of crazy. Still, he wasn't doing it in a crazy way. He did it more wolfish-like—as though he knew for sure that there was something hidden here and was bound and de-

termined to find it. And knowing him as I did, the grasping old coot, I was more satisfied than ever that it was money.

But whose money was it? Who had hidden it? And how had he found out about it? I wondered too, with mounting excitement, if we found the money ahead of him if we could keep it. There was some kind of a law on that—about finding hidden money. And I made up my mind to ask Dad about it when I got home.

Until then I hadn't thought of *us* finding the money. For I thought naturally that old Sweet, with his secret knowledge of it, would soon recover it, when he had the house to himself. But it seemed, from what we could observe, that there was some kind of a gap in his information. He knew the money was hidden in the house—and he knew its hiding place was associated somehow with the old wall-paper that had been up there so long. But there was still something, of some kind, that he hadn't been able to figure out yet. His puzzled defeated actions proved that. And until he had this one particular thing figured out right he apparently was helpless.

Oh, if we only knew what *he* knew! Maybe then we could fill in the missing gap and get the money ahead of him. It was an exciting thought, and wanting to watch him further, to see if we could pick up any important clews from his actions, I slid down, when he left the attic, and with Poppy beside me dropped lightly to the ground.

"Well, what do you make of it?" says Poppy, as we further kept the moving figure in sight through a window.

"There's something here, all right," says I.

"I suppose he'll tear the house down next."

"Look at him now!" says I. "He's pulling paper off the wall."

"The great wall-paper mystery," laughed Poppy.

Having pulled off, and scraped off, several large pieces of wall-paper from the different rooms, the searcher took the pieces to the kitchen sink and turned the water on them. There was a wait of several minutes, as the water kept running. Then he took the soaked paper out of the sink and tried to pull it apart, into layers.

"Boy!" I told Poppy, bewildered. "You sure said a plenty, when you called it the great wall-paper mystery."

"But what's he trying to do anyway?" puzzled Poppy.

"Search me. I can understand him tearing up the attic floor. But I can't understand this."

Poppy continued to tug at his wits.

"Now, what *would* he soak that paper for?" he mumbled to himself, trying desperately to untangle the riddle.

"He's still at it," says I, watching intently. "And, there!—look! He got the paper apart that time."

"Oh, I catch on now, Jerry!" Poppy's voice took a happy turn. "What he just pulled apart

was *two* pieces of wall-paper. Don't you see? One kind of paper was pasted on over the other. And he's trying to find paper of a certain pattern, put on here years ago."

But even in this the greedy-acting searcher apparently failed. For he finally gave it up, and after another hour, spent tapping the lower walls, he locked up and went off disgruntled into the night.

"He just couldn't get the idea out of his head," says Poppy, as we left too, "that the money was hidden in that old wall-paper up there. But evidently he thinks now it's pasted over with wall-paper, instead of being rolled up in it."

"But I still don't understand," says I, at sea, "what he was doing with that paper in the sink. Tell me again, Poppy."

"Well, he knows there's money hidden here. See? And the clew to it is a certain kind of old wall-paper. For years they've been putting on one layer of wall-paper over another here. For that's the cheapest way of doing it, you know. And now, if he's lucky enough to find the exact kind of paper he's looking for, he'll know that the money is hidden somewhere under it."

"In the wall plaster—you mean?"

"Yes, that's the way it looks to me, Jerry."

"Gee! If only we had some kind of an x-ray machine, huh?—so we could see right through the old house. Then we could grab the money ahead of him."

"I don't think we've got much of a chance of

seeing *that* money, Jerry. For to-morrow he'll probably find it himself, while we're working down town. So I guess we might just as well kiss it good-by, and go to bed."

But we were to learn, happily, that the money wasn't to be found that easily. And will *you* ever get a surprise, and a thrill too, as you read on! Oh, boy! I've got so much bully good stuff coming that I hardly know how to tell it all.

CHAPTER VI

REVENGE!

I TOOK a peek in Wheeler's drug store when I passed on the way home. For that's Red's pet hang-out after a picture show, especially if he has some money to spend. And sure enough, there he sat as usual at the soda counter with a big gob of ice cream in front of him.

"And how was the show?" I asked, as I sat down beside him to watch him enjoy himself.

"Swell," he smacked.

"And did you hear about me getting smeared with the rotten tomato?" says I.

"No—where?" he looked up quickly.

"On the way over to Poppy's house to-night. Just before I got to his corner young Sweet went by me in his pa's car and smeared me."

"With a rotten tomato?"

"Yes."

"But why didn't you jump—and dodge it?"

"*Jump?* I didn't even know it was coming—you big ape!—till I got it right in the face. And, boy!—was I a mess! I even had to borrow this shirt of Poppy to get home in."

Red was laughing now.

"I almost wish that I'd gone with you instead of to the show," says he. "For I bet you looked funny—with tomato soup runnin' all over you."

"Well, you wouldn't think it was so funny," I growled, "if it was you that got it. For it stunk like sixty. Oof! I still gag when I think of it."

"But why didn't you smear him with a rock? For I hope you weren't scared of him—the big pansy!"

"But didn't I just tell you—you nitwit!—I didn't even know it was coming, till I got it. And by the time I got the seeds out of my eyes he was gone a block. But just wait! He's got something coming from me, let me tell you. And I'm going to get him when he's all dressed up too."

"Then you ought to get him to-night," says Red. "For I just saw him go by here a few minutes ago with Judy Millet."

"Walking?" says I eagerly.

"Yes. He was taking her home, I guess. And, boy!—they sure did look loverlike."

"Gee! I wonder if I could catch him at her house now? For that would be the best ever—to plaster him right in front of her. That *would* take him down a peg or two."

Red began gobbling to beat the cars.

"Just a minute," says he, with the soup running out the corners of his mouth, "and I'll go with you."

And finishing, he made a dash for the door, me after him.

"But where are we going to get the tomatoes?" says I, when we were outside.

"Come on," says he, cutting across Hill Street. "I know where there's some."

We wound up in the pitch-dark alley behind the Tutter Fruit Market.

"Can't you smell 'em?" says Red, as we felt around in the dark.

"Oh, baby!" says I, sniffing. "But where are they?"

"Here they are in this basket—right where I saw them this morning. And I bet a cookie, Jerry, this is where yours come from too. For to-night, after you left me, I saw Sweet drive out of here in a hurry."

"What'll we do?" says I eagerly. "Take the whole basket?"

"And why not?" says Red. "For the more the jucier."

Carrying the basket between us, we scooted for Grove Street, where the two lovers were just coming into sight under a corner light. They could have seen us, if they had been looking ahead. But they were too busy looking at each other to notice anything else. And getting into a bush, near Judy's porch, we crouched, waiting.

They sauntered up, laughing and talking. And did my fingers ever twitch on the tomato I was holding as I took note of those nice clean white trousers, so beautifully creased and turned up, and that nice white sport shirt. Oh, oh! It wouldn't be long now.

"Isn't it a perfectly gorgeous night?" says Judy, as they passed us, arm in arm, on their way to the house.

"It needs just one more thing to make it perfect," says the Great Lover.

"Oh, but to me it's perfect as it is," cooed Judy, "with *you* here."

Good grief! What slop! It almost made me sick to my stomach, coming from a pair of kids their age. But I guess they thought they were acting big, like some of the stuff they had seen in the movies.

"A moon would make it a little bit more romantic," says Big and Handsome.

"As though *you* needed a moon to be romantic," simpered Judy.

Suffering cats! If they didn't stop that pretty soon, I told myself, I would keel over. For of all the sickening junk!

They paused at the foot of the porch steps.

"Well, thanks for a wonderful time," says Judy.

"I may go to Chicago to-morrow to see about my art course. But if I don't, I'll be around to-morrow night as usual. So make it a date, Bright Eyes."

"Oh, dear!" Bright Eyes simpered tragically. "I don't see why you've got to go to Chicago to study art. Why can't you study it right here?"

"In this hick town?" Big Stuff snorted scornfully. "Why, the people around here don't know what art is. And I'm pretty good at it, you

know. I've taken all the prizes at school."

Which was true too. But that didn't make him look any better to me—the big blow-hard!

"Did you see those last drawings of mine in the school annual?" he asked.

"Why, sure. And they were perfectly gorgeous of course, like all of your work. For I know you're a born artist, Wilsie. But I wish you wouldn't go to Chicago. For I know what'll happen then. You'll completely forget about poor little me."

"Never," says the Great Lover, his bosom swelling manfully.

And slipping his arm around her, he gave her a squeeze.

"Oh, Wilsie!" she palpitated. "You're such a big brutal bear."

"You sure click with me, Bright Eyes."

"Yes, but you'll forget all about me when you go to Chicago. For I know how the city artists behave—with their wild studio parties. I've read about it. And after an exciting life like that, I'll be just a simple little country girl to you."

"No, Judy," he tremoloed, "you'll always be my great inspiration."

And she got another squeeze.

Red gagged so loud, over the sickening stuff, that Big and Handsome heard him.

"What's that?" says he quickly.

"Just a little turtle dove cooing to its mate in the treetops," Judy breathed romantically.

And that time *I* gagged.

"There's someone over there in that bush," says Romeo suspiciously.

And when he came over, to see who it was, we let him have it.

Poppy told me afterwards that he could hear us yelling, and the tomatoes spatting, clear over on Elm Street—which was stretching it, of course. But there was plenty of yelling, let me tell you, both from us, as we heaved away with perfect aim, and from Judy on the porch. As for dear little Sweety-pie himself, after the first gooey crack he couldn't yell. All he could do was gurgle and spit. For I caught him right on the kisser, just like he had caught me.

Red cracked him next—right in the neck—a regular old hit-and-splatter crack. And seeing now what he was up against, he darted for the porch where Judy was, thinking we wouldn't dare to paste him there. But we slam-banged him just the same, finally chasing him onto the porch next door, and from there down the street.

"My father'll put you in jail for this," he screeched back at us between shots. "For you got my pants all tomatoes. And you hit me in the face too."

"And who hit *me* in the face?" I yelled, letting go at him again.

"Ouch!" he squawked, as the tomato flattened out on his shirt front.

"And here's one for good measure," yelled Red, letting go a sizzler.

"OUCH!" cried Sweet again, doubling up.

But we kind of eased up on him after that. For he had had a plenty. And was he ever a sight as he started, fuming, for home. There was no sign of any pretty white pants or white shirt now. Instead, he looked for all the world as though he had been dragged around on some gooey slaughter-house floor.

A terrible humiliating change from the Great Lover of a few minutes before! But it was just the way we wanted it. Boy!—it couldn't have been better. Red and I laughed about it all the way home.

"We certainly ought to get a good night's sleep out of this, Jerry."

"And how," says I.

Yes, it was sweet revenge, all right—not only for that special crack that I got on the way to Elm Street, but for all the other mean tricks that the big bully had played on us. But maybe Red and I wouldn't have been quite so hilarious about it if we had known what was going to happen the following day.

Ouch! But you just go on to the next chapter and I'll tell you all about it.

CHAPTER VII

THE MORNING AFTER

MOTHER collared me as soon as I got downstairs the following morning.

"For goodness' sake!" says she, with a troubled air. "What in the world did you and Donald Meyers do to Mrs. Millet last night? For she's on her way over here, as mad as a hatter."

"We didn't do anything to *her,*" says I.

"She talked so fast on the phone I couldn't understand half she said. But it was something about rotten tomatoes."

"Oh!" says I.

"Well, 'oh' what?" Mother asked quickly. "If you got into trouble over there last night, tell me all about it. For I want to know what she's coming here for."

"I guess she's mad because we socked Judy's beau with some rotten tomatoes."

"Judy's beau? Why, I didn't think the child was old enough to have a beau. Who do you mean anyway?"

"Bill Sweet," I told her.

"But why, in mercy's name, did you pick *him*

for a target? For you know how his father is."

"He socked me first, just before dark. So Red and I laid for him at Judy's house and got even."

"Was he on Judy's porch?"

"Yes, part of the time. And part of the time we had him cornered on Mrs. Blake's porch."

Mother looked at me as though she could hardly believe her ears.

"And do you mean to tell me," says she, "that you actually pegged rotten tomatoes at him, right on people's front porches? Well, if you aren't a big stupid!"

"Why am I?" I asked stiffly. For I thought I had done it pretty slick. I didn't see anything stupid about it.

"And I don't suppose you ever gave a thought to the mess you were making on those porches, or what the women would say about it this morning?"

"No. I was too busy smacking Sweet."

The phone rang.

"Well, you better answer it," says Mother. "For it may be Mrs. Millet again. And if it is, you apologize to her now, just as nice as you know how, and see if you can't get this mess straightened up."

"But I thought you said she was coming over?"

"She may have changed her mind. But don't stand there in front of the phone and let it ring. Go ahead and answer it. And if it *is* her, you do as I told you."

So I took down the receiver, wondering what kind of an apology I could make, for I wasn't a bit sorry about that tomato fight, and don't you think I was either. Young Sweet had done plenty to me. He deserved everything he got.

"Hello," I spoke into the phone.

"Hello," came a high-pitched voice. "Is this the Todd residence?"

"Yes, ma'am," says I.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Todd."

"He isn't here just now."

"And who's this speaking?"

"Jerry."

"Well, young man, you stay right where you are. For I'm coming over there to see you."

And *bang!* went the receiver at the other end.

"Who was it?" Mother asked quickly.

"I think it was Mrs. Blake," says I.

"Well, when you had her on the phone, why in the world didn't you tell her you were sorry? Goodness gracious! I hope *she* isn't coming over here too."

"She said so."

Mother brushed me out of the way.

"Well, let me have that phone quick."

And getting Dad, at the brickyard, she told him to rush home as fast as he could. The family son and heir, she told him, had been tomato fighting again, and half the women on Grove Street were headed for our house to complain about their messed-up porches.

Mrs. Millet, fat and gabby, got there first. And to hear her tell it you'd think that we had dumped a whole depraved catsup factory on her front porch. Even her canary was sick, she said, from the bad smell. She had that dumb-looking husband of hers along. And every time she said, "Now, isn't that so, James?—didn't our darling little Tweet Tweet fall off its perch this morning?" he shook his wooden head and said, "Yes, yes, my love. Quite right, my love."

Dad came in with Mrs. Blake just as little Tweet Tweet tumbled over. Then Mr. Meyers came, looking like a hearse with a flat tire, with Red tagging behind. The more it was talked over the worse it sounded for us. But do you think that poor Red or I could get in a word in our own defense? No, sir-ee! Every time we started to say anything the whole bunch of them glared at us, as though we were the worst hoodlums they'd ever set eyes on. And in the end, after apologizing to them separately, Red and I had to go over to Grove Street with a mop and scrubbing brush and clean up Mrs. Millet's front porch.

She was dog-goned mean about it too. For she's the snappy kind—always wanting to boss someone around. When she talks she stands with her elbows stuck out on each side, and her fat chin hung out. Just like a prizefighter. It's easy to see why her blank-faced husband always says, "Yes, yes, my love," every time she asks

him something. For if he didn't side in with her she'd probably land on him with a rolling pin, like Maggie in the funny pictures.

She stood over us all the time we were working. And having finally cleaned up the porch to her satisfaction, after three washings (for there was dirt in the corners that she hadn't touched for the last twenty-six years!), she set us to work on the front of her house. Whenever she saw the least speck of tomato juice, we had to scrub it off with soap and water. She even had us scrubbing off fly specks, clear up under the eaves. We scrubbed till we were just about scrubbed out. For it was blamed hard work, let me tell you, climbing up and down ladders, and moving them around. But still she kept on saying, "Now, there's a place up there—don't overlook that," or, "I can see a place up there that you missed, so go right back and do it all over again, or I'll call up your fathers." What she was trying to do, the big gyp, was to get the whole front of her house washed. And she kept after us till she succeeded too, then setting us to work in the yard with a rake. And, mind you, we had to rake up every little speck of tomato, over the whole front yard. She even made us get down on our hands and knees and pick up the seeds.

Judy came out while we were digging a hole to bury the stuff in the back yard, her mother for the minute having left us to answer the phone.

SHE SET US TO WORK ON THE FRONT OF HER HOUSE——

Poppy Ott & Co. Inferior Decorators *Page 56*

"Rowdies!" says Judy, with her nose in the air.

"What's the matter?" says Red quickly. "Got hay fever?—or does your nose pull up that way with a spring?"

"There ought to be laws," says she superiorly, "to protect decent people from hoodlums like you two."

"Yes," says Red sweetly, "our parents brag on us too."

"I hope Wilsie's father puts you both in jail."

Red rolled his eyes at me—the big monkey!

"Oh, darling!" he simpered. "Please don't go to Chicago, and leave your little lovey-dovey all alone."

Gosh! He looked about as romantic as a speckled cat with gravy all over its face. But I helped him out with a nice loverlike sigh.

"All we need, Bright Eyes, is a moon," I gurgled.

Judy's face was scarlet now.

"If you boys don't keep still," she cried, "I'll call mamma."

But Red kept right on. For he was so tired now he was feeling kind of crazy, I guess.

"Oh, you're such a big brutal bear," he cooed up at me.

"Mamma!" Judy squealed. "Mamma, come here—quick."

Mrs. Millet came waddling, her arms akimbo as usual.

"And what are the little snips doing now?" she rumbled, in her mannish way.

"Digging a hole," piped Red faintly, making the dirt fly.

"They've been teasing me about Wilsie."

Out came the big elbows another notch.

"Well, if I hear them teasing you about Wilsie, or anything else, it won't be good for them."

"And is that deep enough?" Red asked meekly, standing beside the hole.

"Yes. And when you're through here, I want you to get out and stay out. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am," says Red meekly.

"You watch them, Judy, while I put the potatoes on for dinner. And if they don't fill in that hole the way I told them, you just call *me*. I'll see that they do it!"

"Br-r-r!" chattered Red.

Mrs. Millet wheeled sharply.

"What's that?" she snapped, scowling.

But Red was shovelling to beat the cars.

"Isn't he a terrible boy, mamma?" says Judy, with her nose still tilted. "He isn't a bit like Wilsie."

"Thanks," says Red.

And having filled in the hole now, we grabbed our mop and beat it.

Red wanted to rest, when we got around the corner. So I sat down with him at the curb.

"Oh, oh!" he groaned, resting his chin in his hands. "I hope I never get into a mess like that again."

"Isn't she an old rip-snorter though?" says I, scowling back.

"Yes—if I ever get married, I sure hope I don't get one like *her.*"

"And she made us clean clear up to the roof!—the big gyp! And did you see all the dirt I dug out of that porch, Red?"

He gave another deep groan.

"I guess we weren't so smart after all," says he, "when we socked young Sweet on Judy's front porch."

"No," I agreed regretfully, "we should have waited till he was out in the street."

"And I suppose next, we'll have to have to go over and clean up that other porch," Red gloomed.

"Oh, there wasn't very much over there," I told him. "Mrs. Blake cleaned it up herself. I saw her."

"Then why did she make so much fuss about it this morning, when she was at your house?" he asked.

"Mrs. Millet is to blame for that. For she was so mad over her own messy porch that she got the neighbors mad too. She's the one who got them started."

"Well, we certainly paid plenty," says he, "for the fun we had last night. But come on—let's go home to dinner. For I'm half starved."

CHAPTER VIII

COMPANY

MOTHER was bouncing around the kitchen like a rubber ball when I dragged myself in a few minutes later.

"Now, hurry up and wash your face and hands," says she excitedly. "And you better put on your blue suit too, for we're going to have company for dinner, and I want you to look your best."

There was pie, cheese, pickles, salad and everything else setting around the kitchen, ready to be carried to the table. I could smell steak frying too. And, boy!—did I perk up!

"Who is it?" I asked quickly.

"A very dear girlhood chum of mine—Miss Martha Lindsley. She's a business woman in Chicago now, with a big salary. And this afternoon she may want you to drive over to Walkers Lake with her."

"But I was going to help Poppy," says I.

Mother flew with a kettle of steaming potatoes to the sink, to drain them, and then flew back to the table again, where she started mashing furiously.

"You can help Poppy to-morrow," says she.

"But if your friend wants somebody to go over to Walkers Lake with her, why don't you go yourself?"

"No, she wants *you*. But she'll tell you all about that herself. And, Jerry!—listen now. Please don't gobble this noon. Take your time. And if you have trouble with you steak, for mercy's sake don't sit there and saw on it like it was a knotty piece of cord wood."

"Is she going to stay all night?"

"No—she has to be back in Chicago to-night by ten-thirty. And your father's got her over to his brickyard now, showing her around. But they'll be back any minute. So hurry and get yourself cleaned up, for I want you to run down to the drug store to get some ice cream for the pie."

"Oh, boy!" says I, dashing up the stairs. For a boy can forget a lot of lame spots, let me tell you, when there's a dinner like that coming, with ice cream on top of it.

"And, Jerry," Mother quickly called after me.

"Yes—what?" I asked, stopping on the stairs.

"You better put on your blue checked shirt. For that looks the nicest on you. And for goodness' sake, don't get your necktie in a wad. If you can't get it right yourself, come on down and I'll help you."

"Gosh!—anybody'd think it was the President of the United States here," I laughed.

I had noticed a strange roadster in front when

I came in. And now I ran to an upstairs window to get a better look at it, having just been told that I might soon be riding around in it. Boy!—it sure was a nifty little car, all right—light blue, with shiny nickel stuff all over it, and a long sleek hood. It wouldn't be tough at all, I told myself, to ride around in a bus like that. And Poppy, of course, could wait.

But what did the visitor want me to go over to Walkers Lake with her for? That's what kept me guessing, as I hurriedly cleaned up and jumped into my good clothes.

I thought, from what Mother had told me about the visitor and her big salary, that she'd be a sort of mannish woman, with prim spectacles jammed down on her nose, and commanding shoulders. But she wasn't a bit like that. When she came in with Dad, talking and laughing, with her girlish hair dancing in her face and her eyes sparkling, she seemed more like a jolly older sister than an experienced business woman. She was dressed right up to snuff too. So I could see why Mother was making such a fuss over her.

"And do you know how big you were, Jerry, the last time I saw you?" the visitor asked laughingly, when Dad proudly brought me forward in my blue suit and carefully knotted tie to show me off.

"It must have been a long time ago," says I. "For I can't remember you at all."

"Well, you were just about that long," she measured laughingly with her hands.

"Yes," put in Dad, "and was he ever the red-faced squawker! It kept me busy the first month walking the floor with him."

Mother bustled in red-faced from her work over the kitchen stove.

"Well, come now," says she. "Dinner's all on the table."

I learned, during dinner, why the pleasing visitor was going over to Walkers Lake, a summer colony near us. She was a home decorator. She had to look up a place at the lake that has been closed for more than fifteen years, to see what could be done in the way of getting it in shape for its owner's early return from England. And I was to be her guide!

Dad took me aside after dinner.

"Did Mother tell you," says he gravely, "that Mr. Sweet was here right after you left this morning?"

"No," I spoke shortly, wishing suddenly that I'd let Bill Sweet and his old tomato go. For it seemed to me that I was causing a lot of trouble for everybody, myself included.

"I knew he'd come fuming over here about that tomato fight. For he isn't the kind to let anything like that pass—not when his son gets the worst of it. But I shut him up in a hurry when he started talking about a lawsuit. For with his own son firing the first tomato, I couldn't see that he had any grounds for a damage suit. But he'll dislike you more than ever now, Jerry. So will his kid. And while I don't expect you to

crawl off like a worm, every time you meet them, still it will help a lot, in keeping peace, if you'll avoid them all you can. Will you promise to do that, son?"

"I sure will," I promised faithfully.

"And is everything all hunky-dory now over on Grove Street?"

"It ought to be," I grimaced. "For Mrs. Millet worked us into cleaning the whole front of her house this morning."

"Oh, oh!" chuckled Dad. "I guess that's getting your pay, all right. But it's all over now, Jerry—so just forget about it, and get as much fun as you can out of that auto trip this afternoon."

The place that Miss Lindsley and I were going to was a big turreted castle-like house, built of native stone, with wings going out everywhere, and all enclosed by a high stone wall. I had been by the showy place often, as it looked down on the north shore of Walkers Lake from a high wooded knoll. And once, when some workmen were going in and out, I got a good look inside through the usually locked gate.

A man named Boyden had built the big mansion, foolishly sinking his whole fortune into it. Boyden's Folly, it was called then. In fact many of the older people near there still call it that. But the name was officially changed to Crayden Towers when an English Countess, with some kind of American connections, came along and

bought it. And it was this titled Englishwoman, a widow, who had cabled Miss Lindsley's employers to rush the place into shape for use again.

Dad laughed when I asked him if the Countess was likely to bring over her coronet, and wear it to church. For I thought that would be pretty swell, to see a real Countess marching up the main aisle of our church with a coronet on her head.

"But where did you get the idea, Jerry, that Countesses wear their coronets to church?" he asked.

"They do it over in England," says I. "For I read about it in one of my books at school. There was a picture of a church called Westminster Abbey. They were crowning the King that day, and all the Dukes, Lords, Counts and Countesses were parading with their coronets on."

"Well," Dad laughed again, "maybe Countess Crayden will bring her coronet over this time, if she really has one. But I predict, if she wears it to church, and that green wig of hers too, she'll stampede the congregation. For half the time she has her wig on backwards."

"That would look funny," I laughed, picturing it in my mind.

"She doesn't care a rap herself how she looks. And if she had a coronet handy, or an old tin can or anything else, she'd just as soon wear it in public as not. A perfectly dumfounding woman, Jerry."

"Dumfounding how?" I asked eagerly. For this was interesting.

"In almost everything she does. Take for instance the time she bought the bricks from me. I thought naturally that she was going to build another chimney on that big house of hers. But do you know what she did with the bricks, Jerry?"

"No—what?" I asked curiously.

"She was having some trouble then with the man on the adjoining estate, and she used to sit on that wall of hers by the hour and peg bricks at his dog."

"Honest, Dad?" I asked. For it didn't seem believable to me that a real Countess would do a ridiculous thing like that.

"She's worth many millions, Jerry. And all her life she's done exactly as she pleased, depending on her money to patch up things behind her. If she came in here and took a sudden fancy to your mother's tablecloth, away it would go, without any I, yes or no to anybody. And the next time she came she'd probably bring a dozen tablecloths, all finer than the one she had taken, or send a hundred-dollar bill instead."

"Boy! I wish she was going to be over there this afternoon. Maybe she'd give *me* a hundred-dollar bill."

"She's never so happy as when she has people staring after her in utter stupefaction, as you'd be staring now if she were walking out of here with our parlor rug. But usually she takes old

stuff, replacing it with new. That's the way she enjoys her money. It's because she's such a grand, noble old soul at heart, and so generous to those around her, especially the poor and deserving, that her remarkable oddities are so freely overlooked. But you better get your cap now, for I see that Miss Lindsley is ready to go—and her time here is limited."

CHAPTER IX

A BUSY AFTERNOON

MISS LINDSLEY took me along mostly that afternoon, I learned, to carry a light stepladder for her while she went from room to room measuring the walls and getting together a list of the different kinds of wall-paper and other materials that would be needed to fix the house up again.

The caretaker, a spindling-legged suspicious-eyed old man, followed us around, fearful I guess that we'd walk off with some of the valuable furniture. Boy—it was a big ghostly house! Our footsteps echoed hollowly as we went from room to room, for the rugs were all rolled up. All of the best furniture had white covers over it too, which helped with the ghostliness.

"And you say, lady, you're sending some men down here to-morrow to paper and paint?" the caretaker asked at the gate when we were leaving.

"Yes, they ought to get here some time to-morrow morning," Miss Lindsley informed. "For I'm going to start them early. And will you be here to let them in?"

"Oh, yes—certainly, certainly. I'm here all the time, lady, night and day. For the Countess gave me orders never to leave here. It's been awful lonesome though, all these years. And you say she's coming soon?"

"She expects to sail next Monday, I believe."

"Then I better get busy right away and get things tidied up around here. For I want everything to be nice and pretty when the Countess gets here."

"Well, many thanks for your help," Miss Lindsley spoke finally. "And if nothing happens you'll see me again in a few days. For I'll have to follow up the job closely."

We drove home a different way, Miss Lindsley wanting to see more of the lake, with its showy summer homes.

"And will it be all right with you, Jerry," she asked pleasantly, as we skimmed along in the fine summer sunshine, "if I drop in on you again soon?"

"Oh, sure," I told her quickly. "That'll be swell."

"I don't want to wear out my welcome. But it certainly was grand to see all of you again, especially your darling mother. For we had the jolliest times together when we were girls, Jerry. And I sometimes wonder if I shouldn't have married, like your mother. For after all every woman should have a husband and a home of her own."

"Well, maybe you better wait for me," I joked.

For she was the kind that you could joke with.

She laughed gaily at that.

"Now, Jerry!—that's a bargain. I'm engaged at last! And don't you dare go back on me either. Or I'll sue you for breach-of-promise. But tell me, who lives in that marvelous place over there?"

"A Milwaukee millionaire," I told her.

"And there's still another showy place farther on! I think I'll take down the names of these people, and see if we can't get some more business down here. For we like to work for millionaires, Jerry."

"But how did you ever get to be an interior decorator?" I asked her curiously.

"I really wanted to be a landscape artist, at the start. And I still dab at it in my few spare moments. But I found there wasn't much money in it—not for the kind of pictures I could paint. So I took up home decorating instead, putting my knowledge of color harmony to work in that practical way. I really have made wonderful progress too. But I still dream of the time when I'll be independent, and can go back to my cows and flowery hillsides. For somehow I manage to get either a cow or a flowery hillside into every landscape I do."

"We have a kid in Tutter," says I, "who thinks he's a born artist. His name is Bill Sweet."

"Sweet? We have a heavy stockholder and director from here by that name."

"Truman Sweet?" I asked her quickly.

"Yes, that's his name. I've never met him personally, but I've heard a great deal about him in the office. For one time he tried to worm himself into the presidency."

"Yes, he would," I snorted.

"I never thought of him living here till you mentioned the name."

"But how did he get a hold in your company?" I asked.

For I never knew till then that the Sweets owned stuff in Chicago too. Gosh! They sure had plenty, all right.

"His father bought the stock years ago, for a song. And they've been wise enough to keep it in the family. I dare say it's worth forty or fifty thousand dollars now."

"I wonder if Pappy Paisley knows about that," says I thoughtfully.

"And who might Pappy Paisley be?" Miss Lindsley asked curiously.

I told her about the old paint store.

"And I was just wondering," I went on, "if Truman Sweet's father paid for the stock with his own money, or the store's money."

"I rather imagine he used his own money. Or the stock would have been divided."

"Just the same," I waggled, "I'm going to ask Pappy about it some time. For maybe that partner of his slipped something over on him."

Having rounded the pretty mirrorlike lake, with the fast cars of the summer residents zipping

by us both ways, we swung into the river road coming into town from the south and soon drew up at our house.

Miss Lindsley left almost immediately for home, telling us laughingly that she was likely to run in on us any time now, till that job at Walkers Lake was finished. So free at last I hurried down to the old paint store to see how Poppy was coming along on his new job, sorry that I hadn't been able to get down to see him sooner.

And, boy!—did I ever stare when I turned the corner into Canal Street, where the store was. For since I had last seen it the weather-beaten old store front had been completely repainted red, white and blue, from the sidewalk clear up to the peak. Instead of having the shabbiest store on the short street now, Pappy Paisley had the showiest.

He never had done any window-washing himself—at least, not since I could remember. If a passing truck splashed mud on his front windows, he just sat around contentedly, waiting for some helpful shower to come along and wash the mud off. In the same way, if a spider spun a web over his front door, he figured if he waited long enough the wind would blow the web down for him. But there were no window spots or messy cobwebs now. No, sir-ee! With good old Poppy pepping things up in there, everything had been cleaned up as slick as a whistle.

He was standing knee-deep in old wall-paper

when I went in, plainly tired from his continued hard work, but still going it like sixty. For that's the way he is. Once started on a thing like this, he keeps everlastingly at it, with all the pep and skill he can muster, till the job is finished.

"If you want to, Jerry," he told me, after a welcoming grin, "you can put some of that old wall-paper back for me. For I've got it all dusted off now."

"Where does it go?" I asked willingly.

"In those bins over there," he pointed. "But be careful you don't get it mixed up. For that's been the main trouble around here the past few years—nothing was ever put in its place, or ever dusted off. I bet I took a peck of dirt out of those bins alone."

"They sure look nice and clean now," says I, as I set to work as instructed.

"Well, they ought to be. For I've been working like a nailer here since six-thirty this morning."

"And do you like it as well as you thought you would?" I asked.

"Oh, sure. It's fun. I want to tell you though, it's no easy cinch selling stuff like this, as I've found out already."

"What's the matter with it?" says I.

"Well, wall-paper styles change, you know, the same as clothes. And you wouldn't buy a suit of clothes that had been on the dealer's shelf for ten years, would you?"

"I don't think so. But I never knew there was

that much change in wall-paper. It all looked about the same to me."

"Well, it doesn't look the same to the women who buy it. For they know what's in style. And about the only way to unload paper like this is to put the price down so low that the customers'll take it regardless of style."

"But haven't you got any new wall-paper at all?" says I.

"Jerry," he spoke earnestly, "you mustn't repeat this—it would be bad for the business if you did. But it's an honest-to-goodness fact, there isn't a roll of paper in this store less than five years old. And some of it's fifty. So you can imagine how hard it is to talk women into buying it, even for a song."

He was so earnest about it that I grinned.

"But you've got a good line of gab," I told him encouragingly. "So I bet you sell it all in time. And is that your paint job out in front?"

"Yes, how do you like it?"

"Swell," says I.

"Pappy thinks it's too loud. But I told him as long as we had to paint the store front anyway—and you know how tacky it looked!—we might just as well let the public know we're here."

"And where's Pappy now?" I asked curiously.

"Upstairs, sorting over some more old wall-paper, to save the best of it."

I stopped my work, staring.

"*More?*" says I. "You don't mean to tell

me, for Pete's sake, that you've got more than this?"

"Say, boy!—you haven't seen anything yet. If I could get just a penny a roll for all the old wall-paper jammed in this building, Pappy and his wife would be rich."

"Well, you certainly ought to get a penny a roll for it easy enough," says I. "For it ought to be worth that much to the farmers around here to paper the inside of their chicken coops with."

"I never dreamed that Pappy had so much old wall-paper stored in here. Of course, I knew he had a lot. But honest, Jerry!—he's literally got tons and tons of it stored upstairs. It's jammed in like cord wood, clear to the ceiling."

"Maybe I better get out of here," I laughed, "before the ceiling caves in on me."

"I told Pappy this afternoon that he would have a cave-in if he didn't get the wall-paper down out of there. But what in Sam Hill are we going to do with it, Jerry, when we move it? For you can see how packed we are down here already."

"But where did it all come from?" says I. "How did Pappy ever happen to buy so much of it?"

"Oh, it's been piling up here for years. He always bought twice as much as he needed, till his credit ran out a few years ago. He never realized, I guess, that times were changing, and that people weren't using as much wall-paper as

they did. For paint's the big thing nowadays."

"Yes, that's what Mother uses. I don't think she's got a papered room in the house, unless it's some little closet."

"Few modern houses like yours are papered nowadays. But you'll still find a lot of wall-paper in the poorer houses, like that one of Sweet's that we just moved out of."

I thought of the hidden money.

"And how'd Sweet come out to-day, Poppy?" I asked eagerly. "Did he find the money, as you thought he would?"

"I don't think so, Jerry—not yet. For the last I heard he was still over there pulling plaster off."

"Oh, goody-goody!" I danced. "And now maybe we can find it ourselves, huh?"

"I don't see what chance we've got, if *he* can't find it. Besides I'm going to be gosh-awful busy down here for the next few weeks. But let's sit down a minute, for I'm tired."

CHAPTER X

MRS. MILLET'S THREAT

WE HAD the old wall-paper pretty well picked up now. And while Poppy was resting I got a broom and swept up.

"And what are we going to do to-night?" says I, when I finished.

"Well, if I feel as tired after supper as I do now," says he, stretching wearily, "I think I'll go right to bed."

"Oh, shucks!" I grumbled, disappointed. "I thought we could do some more detecting. For, gosh!—I want to find that money if I can. And if we spy on old Sweet long enough, we ought to pick up some kind of a clew to where it is."

Poppy fished a paper out of his shirt pocket.

"Here's something that ought to interest you, Jerry," says he.

"What is it?" says I quickly.

"A list of the people who lived in that old house before us. I got it from Granny Paisley this noon. For she knows the history of the old house from the time it was built."

There were five names written on the paper, like this:

Butch Morgan (now in the county poorhouse)
Ludwig Blitzer (now living with his son)
Carrie Strew (buried in the potter's field)
John Pine (day laborer during his lifetime, had six children)
Jonathan Sweet (died rich)

"Take that first name," says Poppy. "It's a cinch they wouldn't take a man to the poorhouse who had money to hide. So that eliminates him. As for the Blitzers, I guess you know as well as I do how poor they are. For last winter they almost froze to death in that old shack of theirs down by the river. Carrie Strew was buried in the potter's field, after supporting herself in her old age with a wash-tub, which proves that she didn't hide the money. And a day laborer, like John Pine, with six kids to feed and clothe, wouldn't ever have enough money on hand to justify hiding it. So if there *is* money hidden there, as we think, it's pretty plain who hid it."

"But I never knew that old Jonathan Sweet lived there himself," says I excitedly, as I ran my eyes down the list.

"He built the house, Jerry, just about the time that he and Pappy formed their partnership."

"Oh, rats!" says I, disappointed. "I thought maybe if we found the money we could keep it. But we wouldn't dare to, if it belongs to the Sweets."

We had wondered how Truman Sweet had

found out that there was money hidden there. But that was plain enough to us now. He undoubtedly had found some mention of it in his father's old papers. And now, when the money was found, it would add just that much more to the Sweets' riches.

"Did your folks ever tell you anything about Jonathan Sweet, Jerry?" Poppy asked me gravely.

"I've heard them speak of him, and all the money he left behind when he died. But that's about all I know about him. Why?"

"Well, there seems to be a wide difference of opinion about him around here. Some of the people who knew him and his many business deals say he was as straight as a string. Others say he was as crooked as a snake. Even Granny and Pappy disagree about him. *She* says, if she and Pappy had gotten what they should out of the store, during the partnership, they wouldn't be where they are to-day. But he says they *did* get everything they should—that Jonathan Sweet never cheated them out of a penny—but she spent it all herself, as fast as she got her hands on it. And I guess, if the truth is known, she did spend plenty. For she's the one who engineered the purchase of that old car. Just think!—fourteen hundred dollars dropped there in a wad, to say nothing of what they had to spend afterwards to keep the crazy thing going. She's got a parlor sofa too that cost five hundred dollars, and a three-hundred-dollar grandfather's clock.

I could tell you more too. So you can see where much of the money went to. Still, they may have had more coming to them than they got. For Jonathan Sweet did all the bookkeeping himself during the partnership, and he could have cheated them easy enough if he had wanted to."

"But how would he do it, Poppy?—pocket a dollar or two out of every big sale, and then mark it down short in the books?"

"That's what Granny Paisley says he did. She says he stole thousands of dollars from them that way."

"And not wanting it to show in his bank-book, he hid it in his house, huh?"

"Yes, or secretly bought stock with it."

"Say!" I cried excitedly. "He *did* buy stock."

And I told about the Chicago firm, and Truman Sweet's big holdings in it.

"Well, I don't know what to think about it myself," Poppy puzzled over the matter. "For if there was stealing like that going on in the store, it seems to me that Pappy would have tumbled to it in time. But he won't admit that there was a crooked hair in Jonathan Sweet's head."

"Well, if *he* hid the money," says I, "I'm going to quit puzzling over it. For I don't want to mess up in anything that belongs to the Sweets. If it's theirs, let them have it. But when I first heard about it I thought maybe someone else hid it, and if we found it we could keep it."

"I think myself," agreed Poppy, "that we

might just as well forget about it. Anyway, I'm going to be too busy down here for the next few weeks to think of anything else. For if there's a way to sell this old wall-paper I sure want to find it."

"But how about the idea I just gave you?" I laughed. "Don't you like that?"

"What idea?" says he, looking at me quickly.

"Why, the one about the chicken coops."

"Oh, rats!" he snorted. "I thought you were in earnest."

"But I tell you what we can do," says I. "We can make a great big grab-bag. See? For you know how the women love bargains and how the kids go for grab-bags? We'll fill the bag with wall-paper, at a penny a draw, and put it out in front, with a big sign on it."

"You and your old grab-bag! You're crazy!"

"Well, just the same I bet it'd work. And remember how they give dishes away in the picture shows? Well, we can get them to give wall-paper away. How's that? Another five-hundred-dollar idea."

Poppy began to claw his hair.

"Oh, pipe down," he screeched, "or I'll think I'm crazy myself."

"And did you hear how I got even with young Sweet last night?" I laughed.

"Yes, Red told me about it."

"Did he tell you about Mrs. Millet too?—and how she made us clean the whole front of her house?"

"Yes—he told me the whole story."

"Boy!—is she ever an old rip-snorter!"

"Well, if you ask me, I think you were dumb to pitch rotten tomatoes all over her front porch. You can't blame her for getting sore about that. But get out of the way now—quick! For here comes a customer."

It was a man looking for a small paint brush. But Poppy had to send him over to the dime store.

"That's two paint brushes I could have sold to-day if I'd had them. So I guess we'll have to get some, when we get going."

I went out then to buy some gumdrops. And when I got back, what do you know if Poppy wasn't waiting on Mrs. Millet herself! I almost fell over when I ran into the store and found her there.

"Now, here's a very pretty bedroom pattern," says Poppy, unrolling it in front of her.

But it didn't suit.

"Too light," she snapped.

"Well, how's this one?" says he, bringing another sample.

"Too dark."

Other samples that he brought were either too gaudy or too drab, or the pattern was too prominent or something. Her nose went up at all of them.

But he kept on desperately.

"Now, here's a pattern that I know you'll like," says he, sort of patting it lovingly as he

unrolled it in front of her. "For it's one of the most popular bedroom patterns that we've ever had in the store."

He thought by patting it that way she'd like it better, and he'd finally make a sale. But up went her nose as usual.

"Too yellow," says she tartly.

But Poppy made up his mind to sell her this one, or die in the attempt.

"Yellow is a predominating color in bedroom patterns this year, Mrs. Millet. And this is such a distinctive yellow. It isn't just a common ordinary everyday yellow, like you'll find in some of the cheaper papers, but a sort of *golden* yellow. Yes, that's it!" he warmed up to the idea, beaming. "It's a golden yellow!—a King Midas yellow!"

"Well, I don't care if it's a King Midas yellow or a Cinderella-and-the-pumpkin yellow. I wouldn't take it as a gift."

But Poppy was going too good to stop now.

"Mrs. Millet," he beamed, "had you stopped to think that if you buy this wall-paper you'll be the only woman in town to have a King Midas bedroom? And once you have it, I can promise you that you'll never be without it. For there's nothing so cheerful as the sight of gold. You know that yourself. So just think how happy you'll be to wake up every morning in a roomful of gold. For that's exactly how the paper will look, with the morning sun shining on it. Blue Monday? Why, when you get this

paper on, Mrs. Millet, there'll never be another blue Monday for you or blue Tuesday or blue anything. You'll get up every morning singing like a lark. And all for only nine cents a double roll—a bargain you can't afford to miss."

She took a closer squint at the paper.

"Nine cents—did you say?"

"Let me take another look," says Poppy quickly. "Maybe it's seven. Why, Mrs. Millet!—can you imagine your good fortune! There you were, all ready to reach in your purse and pay me nine cents a double roll for a King Midas bedroom—but it's only *seven* cents a roll —and a double roll too. Just think!—only seven cents a double roll for a King Midas bedroom! And I'll bring it over to your house myself, just as soon as I get it trimmed. For I know you won't want to be another night without it."

However the fish wasn't hooked yet.

"I'll give you six," she bit off.

Poppy looked pained.

"But, Mrs. Millet!—I don't believe you realize what a bargain this is at seven cents."

"I said six."

"Well, rather than lose a sale, I tell you what I'll do! I'll make it six and a half."

"I said six."

"Six and a quarter."

"I said six."

"All right," Poppy gave in, with a resigned sigh. "It's yours for only six cents a double

roll, Mrs. Millet. And now can I show you some nice living-room paper? For we're going to have a big sale here in a day or two. And I'd like to have you get first pick of our whole stock."

"Just a minute," says the customer tartly, reaching for the roll of yellow paper. "Let me see that again."

"But, Mrs. Millet——"

"I said, let me have it. And now stand out of the way so I can see it in the sunlight."

"But, Mrs. Millet——"

"Humph! I thought so. So old it's all faded on the edges. And you thought you could work it off on me with that slick gab of yours. Well, young man, I wasn't born yesterday. And if you haven't anything better than that to show me, I'll look elsewhere."

Poppy came patiently with still another roll.

"Well, here's a very pretty pattern," he began all over again. "I'm sure this'll please you."

But it met with the usual fate.

"Humph! Whoever heard of anybody papering a bedroom red?"

"But it's such a distinctive red. It isn't just a common ordinary red, but a sort of——"

"Yes, yes, I know!—a King Midas red. You've got that learned by heart, haven't you? But it so happens that I'm not interested in a King Midas red."

"Oh, but that's where you were mistaken," beamed Poppy. "For I wasn't thinking of King

Midas that time. No, indeed. For you get an entirely different reaction from this paper. The other makes you think of gold. But this gives you an impression of a beautiful dewy garden, with the early-rising sun shining on the rosy-cheeked tomatoes, and the——"

"That's enough," snapped the customer, her big face now as red as the wall-paper itself. "I suppose you think you said something smart! You weren't satisfied with trying to work off some of your worthless old paper on me, with your brainless talk. But just because your chum is here, you had to get smart and remind me of that unpleasant tomato fight last night."

Poor Poppy! If ever a kid looked like a wilted dish-rag, he was it.

"But, Mrs. Millett!—please! I didn't say that to be smart. Honest, I didn't."

"You're both a couple of young smart alecks. But let me tell you this," she said evenly, her eyes glinting now like a snake's just before the strike, "you won't be selling King Midas wall-paper or throwing rotten tomatoes at your betters, when Mr. Truman Sweet gets through with you. For did you imagine for one instant that he'd let you mistreat his son that way, without retaliating? Well, if that's your idea, you have a big surprise ahead. And you deserve everything that's coming to you—the both of you. That's all I've got to say to you."

And out she flounced, the screen-door banging behind her.

CHAPTER XI

POPPY'S SUSPICIONS

POPPY wilted into a chair.

"I guess I didn't do so good that time," says he sheepishly.

"No," I told him, "I guess you didn't. And if you ask me, I think you better have your head examined before another customer comes in."

"Well, don't rub it in, Jerry," he begged wearily. "For it's tough enough to lose the sale, without you jeering about it."

But he had turned up his nose a-plenty at my selling schemes. So I figured I had a perfect right now to get back at him. For what I had suggested wasn't one, two, three as compared to this crazy stuff of his. King Midas! And the rosy-cheeked little tomatoes popping around in the sunshine!

"Why didn't you come right out and tell Mrs. Millet that the red wall-paper made you think of her smeary porch this morning?" I further went at him. "For you might just as well have said that, as the other. Gosh! To hear you run off at the mouth, anybody'd think you were selling vegetables instead of wall-paper."

"Please, Jerry!" he begged again. "My head hurts like sixty. Have a heart!"

"Well, I should think your head would hurt, after all that crazy talk coming out of it. Blue Monday!" I mimicked him. "There won't be any blue Monday for you, Mrs. Millet. You'll get up singing like a lark."

"Say," he yelled, wild-eyed now, "if you don't shut up, I'll shut you up in a hurry. For I don't have to set here and take your old gab."

But I wasn't through with him yet!

"*Her* get up singing like a lark!" I jeered. "Why didn't you tell her she'd get up trumpeting like an elephant, for she's built more like an elephant than a lark. And the dewy-cheeked little tomatoes popping up and down in the morning sunshine! Yes, you'll put this store back on its feet—like so much mud! When you get through with your King Midas and rosy-cheeked little tomato stuff, there won't be any store left. It'll just be a fond memory."

He took after me then, running me upstairs where Pappy was.

"My, my," says the old man, pop-eyed, when I tumbled over him on the floor where he sat sorting wall-paper. "Whatever brought you up here in sech a hurry, Jerry?"

"You better phone for the horse doctor," I told him. "For that head clerk of yours is frothing at the mouth."

"What's the matter, Poppy?" the old man

asked, when the latter bounded in scowling. "What are you chasin' Jerry fur?"

"Oh, he smeared Mrs. Millet's house with rotten tomatoes last night. And now he's laughing at me because I told her that some red wall-paper she was looking at looked like a tomato, and got her mad."

"But what in the world did you go an' tell 'er that fur, Poppy? If you wanted to make a nice comparison, why didn't you say the paper looked like a pretty red rose, instead of a tomato?"

"Yes, stupid, why didn't you tell her that?" I fired at him.

"I guess I *was* kind of dumb to tell her it looked like a tomato," he admitted sheepishly. "But it slipped out before I thought what I was saying."

I was staring around at the wall-paper now. For as Poppy had said, there was enough of it packed in here to paper the moon. At one time it had been kept in bins along the wall. But not only had the bins overflowed, but so much more paper had been stacked in front of them that they could scarcely be seen.

And Poppy had taken on the job of selling it all! Boy, oh, boy! If he succeeded here, I told myself, he certainly would be a marvel.

"What I want to do," he told me, when I asked him about his plans, "is to get the best of it downstairs, so we can have a sale. For I think

we can move a lot of it that way, if we put the price down low enough. For after all, it *is* blamed good wall-paper. It's just old-fashioned, that's all."

"But I still think," says I, "that you ought to try that grab-bag idea of mine, Poppy."

"Well, maybe we will," he grinned. "And that theatre idea too. For we'll need plenty of ideas before we get down to the bottom of those piles."

"An' how's business bin, Poppy?" Pappy came over to ask. "Have you bin sellin' much, while I've bin up here?"

"I could have sold a ten-cent paint brush," laughed Poppy, "if we'd had it in stock."

"Well," the old man spoke in his easy-going way, "let's not git discouraged by to-day's failures. Fur what we don't sell to-day we'll prob'ly sell to-morrow. But come over here, Poppy, I want to show you somethin', fur I jest made a big find."

He had put aside about four dozen rolls of a brownish paper, with stumps and fallen trees worked into it.

"We called it the Abe Lincoln pattern," he told us, as he unrolled it lovingly.

"But what is there about it that you like so well?" Poppy asked, evidently not greatly impressed by the paper himself.

"The color of the leaves, fur one thing. It makes a beautiful wall, when it's put on."

"Well, we'll take it down," says Poppy. "But

I'm not so sure it'll sell as good as you think. For it looks awfully odd to me."

"I almost hate to sell it," the old man hesitated, his voice quavering emotionally. "Fur it was Jonathan Sweet's favorite pattern. An' I'll always remember what he told me about it. 'Sam,' he said to me, 'don't you ever sell that Abe Lincoln paper on me. Fur as long as I'm livin' I'm goin' to have a room papered with it.' An' he did too, right up to the end. That's the room he died in—good ol' Jonathan!"

"Well, if you feel that way about it," Poppy spoke soberly, "why don't you put it away and keep it?"

"Oh, I don't want to be foolish about it," muttered the old man, ashamed now of his emotion. "Anyway Jonathan's gone. So if we kin sell it, I reckon we better let it go fur what it'll bring. Fur I know ma'd never let *me* have a room papered with it. She always hated it herself, largely because ol' Jonathan thought so much of it, I guess. They never did hitch, the two of 'em. They kept me in hot water all the time. But come on now, let's go downstairs an' lock up fur the night, fur it's nigh supper-time."

I walked with Poppy to the corner.

"And shall I come over after supper?" I asked him.

"Yes—and bring your bike too, Jerry. For I may want you to take a ride with me."

"Where to?" I asked quickly.

"Out in the country, to see Martin Sweet."

"But what are you going out to see him for?" I asked, surprised.

"Well, you come over on your bike," says he, "and you'll find out."

I slid into the porch swing beside Dad when I got home.

"I've got something to ask you," I told him earnestly.

"Well, let's hear it," says he, putting his newspaper aside.

"You know about the Countess coming, and how she's having her big house all fixed up?"

"Yes?" he spoke questioningly.

"They're going to paper and paint it from top to bottom. And I've been wondering, if we cabled the Countess at London and told her how poor and deserving old Pappy Paisley is, if she wouldn't give him some of the work. For it's right in his line. And you say she's awfully good that way."

"Have you and Pappy been talking this over?" Dad asked, searching my face.

"No," I spoke quickly, "I haven't said anything to him about it yet."

"And what did Miss Lindsley say about it?"

"It's just my own idea—I haven't mentioned it to anybody yet, but you."

"Well," he spoke thoughtfully, "it's too bad you and Pappy didn't find out about this work before Miss Lindsley's firm got the order. For unless the Countess has changed amazingly since she was here last, I haven't a doubt in the world

but what she would have turned the whole job over to Pappy, and gladly, with unlimited money to work with. For that's her generous way, as I told you this afternoon. Besides, as I recall, she and Pappy were almost inseparable cronies, which would have been another factor in his favor."

"I don't want to do anything sneaking behind Miss Lindsley's back and get her sore at me," says I. "For she's swell. I sure had a dandy time with her this afternoon. But I got to thinking about it while I was with her, and how it'd help Pappy if he could get some of the work himself. And I thought I'd ask you about it."

"There's an old saying, Jerry, if ever you're in doubt don't. So if you feel there's anything unfair to Miss Lindsley in cabling the Countess, as you have suggested, I wouldn't do it if I were you. For we mustn't spoil a fine family friendship."

"All right, I'll just forget about it," says I.

"But I tell you what you can do," Dad added, nodding.

"What?" I asked quickly.

"To-night, before you go to bed, you might write Miss Lindsley a nice little letter, telling her all about your old friend here and the hole he's in. It might be that she can give him some work in his line. For she'll need a big crew of decorators over there. And I don't see why she shouldn't include him in the pay-roll, if she feels he can do the work satisfactorily."

"I'll tell her what a swell draper he is," says I excitedly.

"Yes," says Dad, as we went in to supper together at Mother's call, "you tell her that. And maybe the old man'll get a nice job out of it after all. But until you hear from her favorably, Jerry, I wouldn't mention it to him, or to Poppy either, and arouse any false hopes."

Poppy and Pappy were talking gravely in the front yard when I wheeled in at six-thirty.

"—and that's why I think I ought to go out and see him," Poppy was speaking. "For if there *is* a scheme on foot to close you out, he certainly ought to know about it."

"But why should Truman Sweet want to close me out?" Pappy asked, puzzled. "Fur I don't owe *him* nothin'. We've always bin good friends too. An' if anything like that ever did happen, why his pa'd turn over in his grave. Fur Jonathan Sweet said in his will he always wanted me to have the use of the store. He said it on his deathbed too. 'Sam,' he said to me, jest before the end came, 'I've arranged with my boys so you'll always have the store. An' where I'm goin', partner, I'll be watchin' over you. Fur even death can't break up a partnership like ours. An' don't ever let anybody turn you ag'inst me, Sam, not even your wife, fur I've bin lookin' out fur you in your old age in ways you don't even suspect.' That's the kind of a friend an' partner ol' Jonathan was. An' with him makin' provisions like that fur me, I don't see that there's

any cause for worry, Poppy. I think you're jest lettin' your imagination run away with you."

"But if Jonathan Sweet wanted you to have the store building, why didn't he will it to you outright, so you'd be sure of it, and not leave you dependent on his son?"

Pappy glanced furtively toward the house.

"I jest wanted to make sartin," says he, lowering his voice, "that ma wasn't listenin'. Fur she'd be mad if she heard me say this. But the fact is, Poppy, she always spent too much money. I thought it was all right at the time, fur we were makin' plenty in the store. But Jonathan Sweet always hung onto every penny of *his* share. An' he told me I ought to do the same with mine. He said if I didn't stop ma from buyin' five-hundred-dollar sofas an' two-hundred-dollar china cabinets she'd run me in the poorhouse. An' that's why he left the store that way. He was afraid, if he give it to me outright, ma'd inveigle me into sellin' it an' squander the money. Then I wouldn't have anything left in my ol' age."

"But as long as the Sweets actually own the building, what is there to prevent them from closing you out, if they want to?"

"Why, their deathbed promises to their pa, of course."

"Well," Poppy spoke slowly, his opinion unchanged, "I don't know about Martin Sweet. But from what I've seen of old Truman I don't think any deathbed promises would hold *him*

back very long, if he took a notion in his head to close you out."

"But he couldn't do that if he wanted to, Poppy, fur he don't own the building."

"Well, that's what I want to see his brother about to-night—to see if anybody in the family's been trying to get the store away from him. For I can't shake off the feeling that something's piling up against us that isn't good for us. And I don't think it's all Jerry's tomato troubles either. Either I'm in it, or the store, or something."

"But don't you know, Poppy," reasoned the old man, still undisturbed, "that people often spit out things when they're mad that they don't mean? An' prob'ly that threat of Mrs. Millet's was jest angry talk."

But Poppy stood unmoved.

"She acted just as though old Sweet was planning something against us on the sly, didn't she, Jerry?"

"Yes," I nodded. "But if he tries any monkey-business with me, he'll find himself thrown for a loss. For his own kid started the fight. And my pa says that fixes me o-k."

"And tell Pappy what she said about me, Jerry —for I want him to hear it from you."

"She said you wouldn't be selling King Midas wall-paper when Truman Sweet got through with you."

"There you are, Pappy! See!—it's just like I told you. It's either me or the store that he's

scheming to undo. And I want to make sure that it isn't you, or if it is, help you all I can."

"Well, I still think your trip's unnecessary," the old man waggled shaggily. "I think you're makin' mountains out of molehills. I can't feel a bit worried myself, after ol' Jonathan tellin' the boys that. But go ahead if you want to, an' I'll be waitin' fur your report when you git back. Only be careful, Poppy, an' don't say anything in front of ma. Fur the Sweets are p'ison to her. An' be careful too that you don't say anything to Martin Sweet about his brother an' git them offended at me. Fur Martin in partic'lar has bin mighty considerate with me. You might tell him too, Poppy, that I'll send him some rent money jest as soon as I kin."

Mr. Ott came in an apron to the front door wiping a gravy bowl.

"What do you mean, you young scamp!—slippin' out with all them supper dishes to do?"

"You'll have to do 'em all alone to-night, pa," Poppy laughed. "For I've got important business to attend to. So-long!"

And jumping on his wheel he rode off, with me following.

CHAPTER XII

GATHERING SHADOWS

We found Martin Sweet, a small peaked man with a bad cough, cranking a cream separator in his milk-house.

He wasn't a bit like his brother, either in looks or the way he lived. Truman Sweet had the showiest place in town, for he liked to be pointed out importantly and have the things he owned pointed out. But here everything had the mark of poverty on it, with the buildings going to pieces and weeds crowding in everywhere.

"I wish you boys had brought me out an evening newspaper," the farmer told us wistfully, when he learned that we were from town. "For my radio battery died on me the other day. And since then I've completely lost track of the world."

"I can mail you a newspaper to-morrow morning," Poppy offered quickly.

"Well, let me see if I can find you some money."

After a lot of patient digging with his thin nervous fingers he finally brought out a worn five-cent piece.

"That wouldn't look like much to my brother," he laughed, in a dry resigned way, "but nickels don't come my way as easy as they do his."

I thought he was just talking. But I learned later that he had lost all of his own inheritance through foolish investments. This tacky farm, and the store building in town, were all he had left.

We had heard him coughing when we first came in. And now another spell took him as he bent over to move the cream can.

"Here!—let me do it for you," Poppy offered quickly, jumping in.

"It's my—my heart," the man gasped, sinking into a seat, as white as a sheet now.

"Shall I get you a drink?" Poppy asked.

"No. I'll be all right in a minute or two. Just let me be."

"And don't you want a doctor either?"

"No."

We waited, anxious, till the spell passed.

"That's the second one I've had to-day," the farmer told us, still pale and trembling. "But I'm all right now. For they don't last long."

And in spite of our protests he lifted the cream can himself into a tank of water, to cool overnight, then motioning us out so that he could lock up the rickety building for the night.

"Did you say you're working for Sam Paisley?" he asked Poppy, as we all walked together to the house, where a small dog was barking at us through the back screen-door.

"Yes, sir. I started working for him to-day."

"And did Sam send you out here for something?"

"Not exactly. But he knew I was coming."

"But how did he happen to hire a boy like you? Is he down in bed?"

"Oh, no! He's all right."

"Humph! I didn't think he'd hire a clerk for what little he has to do around there, with all that back rent due."

"But I'm going to help him do more," says Poppy, "so he *can* pay you."

"You seem pretty confident about it for a boy of your age. Who are you anyway?"

"My name's Poppy Ott."

"Ott, huh? A son of that man in the Tutter stilt factory?"

"Yes, sir. And this other boy is Jerry Todd."

The dog smelt us over, bristling, when we went in, with the sun just going down behind us. And, boy!—what a cluttered messy kitchen! I sure was glad that I didn't have to eat there.

"Well, what does Sam want?" the old bachelor asked, as he went about getting himself a late supper by the feeble light of a smelly oil lamp. "What'd you come out for?"

"He told me to tell you that he'd pay up the back rent just as soon as he could. But what I really came out to see you about, Mr. Sweet, is the store building."

"Well, I can't afford to fix it up for you, if that's what you're after."

"We don't expect that. But we would like to know for sure that you aren't going to sell it and put us out."

"Sell it? Where did you get the idea that I was going to sell it?"

"Well, a lady in the store to-day said something that made me think that maybe you were going to sell it to your brother."

"My brother wants to buy it, it's true. But he knows how I stand. It isn't for sale."

"Then your brother *did* try to buy it from you?" Poppy asked excitedly, shooting a quick meaning glance at me.

"Yes. He's been hounding me to death the past month for it. But I told father I'd keep it for old Sam as long as he needed it. And I'm going to keep my word."

"Well, that's swell," says Poppy, relieved.

"And have you boys had supper?"

"Oh, sure," I told him quickly.

"I had trouble to-night getting my old cow out of the slough. That's why I was so late with the chores."

"And did you say," Poppy asked after a moment or two, "that your brother has been after you for a month to buy the store building?"

"Yes—that spoilt kid of his wants to go to Chicago to study art. But Truman thinks he'll be better off in an art store here."

"You mean," says Poppy, surprised, "that your brother is going to start up an art store in Tutter?"

"That's what he wants to do, if he can find a good location, and the boy is contented with it."

"A picture store?" Poppy asked further, his surprise growing.

"I think they're going to carry a line of wall-paper too, just like you."

"Well, that's news to me," says Poppy, looking at me to see if I shared his surprise. "I certainly never expected to hear anything like that. Did you, Jerry?"

"No."

"I think myself, from what I've seen of old Sam's store," the farmer added, "that he might just as well shut it up for good. For he doesn't sell enough down there to keep himself in flour. But I didn't like the idea of Truman trying to crowd in, and told him so too, and how foolish I thought he was to start up an art store there, or anywhere else, for that boy of his. For William isn't old enough to run a store successfully. But when Truman gets his mind set on a thing, especially if there's money in it, you might just as well try to move a mountain. Deathbed promises or others' rights mean nothing to him at all. In that respect we're as far apart as the poles, thanks be. Truman has the idea too that his boy is a natural art wonder. So don't be surprised if a fancy new wall-paper store does open up in town in a few weeks, though it won't be in Sam's place—you can rest assured of that."

It was easy to see now where Mrs. Millet had gotten her information. Young Sweet had been

telling her things while calling there. And never doubting but what the deal would go through exactly as Truman Sweet wanted it to, like his deals usually did, she had angrily used her information to throw a scare into us.

But it wasn't us that Sweet was after mainly, as she had made us believe, but the store building itself, though of course it wouldn't have spoiled the deal for him at all if he could have worked a little spite into it.

However, if we were to believe his brother, there was nothing to worry about so far as the store was concerned.

The street lights were on when we got back to town.

"How about some ice cream?" says Poppy, as we slowed up in front of Wheeler's drug store.

"Lead me to it," says I willingly.

The counter seats were all occupied when we went in, so we went back to a booth.

"What do you want, Jerry?" Poppy asked.

"And are you paying for it?" I grinned.

"Sure thing. I invited you in."

"Then I'll take a banana split with all the trimmings," I joked.

But when the clerk came for the order I told him to bring me a chocolate sundae instead, Poppy ordering the same.

More people came in, laughing and talking, among them Doc Leland, who, finding the other booths full, wedged in beside me, ordering a strawberry special with whipped cream and nuts.

"I've got to keep up my weight," he joked, in his rumbling deep-voiced way. "For the minute I drop below two hundred and fifty pounds my wife thinks I'm fadin' away."

I like Doc. I have every reason to believe that he likes me too. For he saves all of his foreign stamps for me. Almost every Christmas he buys me a present, and sometimes, when he has country calls, I ride along with him just for the fun of it, for he's swell company.

"Your ma well?" he asked me, between liberal spoonfuls.

"Yes, she's swell," I told him.

"Your pa got over that cough yet?"

"Yes, he's all right again."

"He ought to know better than to go fishin' in the rain without a raincoat. If you did it you'd get spanked. And, Poppy, how's the world usin' you?"

"Fine. And can I sell you some nice cheap wall-paper, Doc?" Poppy's eyes danced. "For we've always been good friends. And I can let you in on something pretty nifty now."

"Wall-paper? Humph! What do I want wall-paper for? Do I look like the inside of a house?"

"I thought maybe you'd like to change those fly specks in your office for a new pattern."

"Young feller," rumbled Doc, swelling indignantly, "are you tryin' to insinuate that I've got unsanitary fly specks on my office wall-paper?"

"I thought they were fly specks," laughed Poppy. "But maybe they were polkadots."

"I paid fourteen dollars for those polkadots. So don't you make fun of them now."

"My, what a good memory you've got," laughed Poppy.

He wasn't trying to be fresh. But Doc often jokes us. So Poppy thought he had a perfect right to joke back.

"But if you don't like my polkadots," says Doc, "what have you got to offer me that's better? Are you in the wall-paper business now?"

"Yes, I'm working for Pappy Paisley. I'm the head clerk. And we have a swell King Midas pattern for only six cents a double roll."

"Why don't you sell him the one with the little tomatoes dancing on it?" I put in. "For he likes tomato soup."

"No," Poppy quickly shook his head, "I think the King Midas pattern will suit his office better."

"And what's a King Midas pattern?" says Doc curiously, as he expertly chased a nut down the front of his vest.

"Lots of yellow in it," laughed Poppy.

"And the other has a lot of catsup in it," says I.

"I may have my office repapered at that," says Doc, as he scraped the bottom of his dish. "But I'm too busy to talk about it to-night."

And getting up he waddled off to answer the phone, telling us, when he came back for his hat,

that he had to go out in the country on a heart case.

"Is it Martin Sweet?" Poppy asked, sobering.

"Yes—but how did you know?"

"We just got back from there ourselves. And while we were out there he almost died. Didn't he, Jerry?"

"Yes," I shivered, "I thought myself he was dying."

"He's liable to drop off any time," Doc spoke ominously, "if he doesn't take better care of himself. For you can't correct a heart murmur by will power alone."

Poppy looked across at me, troubled.

"That doesn't sound so good, Jerry. We may find ourselves out in the cold yet."

I saw what he meant. If Martin Sweet died, his brother, as the nearest kin, would get the store building. Then the new store would come in and the old store would go out.

Another triumph for the Sweets!

Gosh! It made me mad all over to think of young Sweet winning out over Poppy that way. And there was poor old Pappy! He'd probably lose his entire stock for the back rent. For he'd get no mercy from the newcomers. And probably he and his wife would end up broken-hearted in the poorhouse.

CHAPTER XIII

EXCITING DEVELOPMENTS

"We've got to work fast, Jerry," Poppy told me the following morning, when I joined him in the store at eight-thirty.

"Why?" I asked quickly, my heart sinking. "Is Martin Sweet dead?"

"No. But he can't last long, Doc says. One of the neighbors found him unconscious after we left last night. It took Doc till after midnight to bring him back. He's going, Jerry. There's no doubt about that. And of course you realize what that will mean to us here."

"But listen, Poppy!—I've been thinking. Truman Sweet can't take all the wall-paper for his back rent, can he?"

"Here's what'll happen, Jerry: He'll attach the stock through the courts. Then the sheriff'll hold a public sale, and the stock'll be auctioned off, till Sweet gets his six hundred dollars."

"And the rest of the stock goes back to Pappy, huh? Well, that helps some. I thought at first he might lose everything. And you can sell the rest of it some place else, can't you, if you get put out of here?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid, when the sheriff gets through, there won't be anything left to sell but trash. For all the good stuff'll be put up first."

"And where's Pappy now?" I asked, looking around.

"Over to the news office, dickering for some handbills. For we're getting up a hurried sale. Ten different kinds of wall-paper to pick from, for a penny a roll. That ought to stir up some interest here, don't you think?"

"And am I supposed to be the official bill peddler?" says I.

"Yes, you and me both," Poppy grinned. "And while we're waiting for the bills, suppose you help me load up that bargain table over there."

"I bet the women'll paw the paper all to pieces," I told Poppy, as we stacked it up on the table to his satisfaction. "For they'll have to look at every roll, to make sure there isn't anything wrong with it."

"Say," Poppy stopped quickly, "I've got a slick idea for that. We'll tie the paper in ten-roll bundles, with some of the pattern wrapped around the outside. Then the buyers can see the pattern without unrolling it. In that way we won't have to sell single rolls either. It'll be ten rolls, for a dime, or nothing."

"And are you going to put in that Abe Lincoln pattern that Pappy told us about yesterday?"

"Yes, run up and get it, Jerry, and I'll tie it up in bundles, with the rest."

Pappy shook his head when he came in later and saw the treasured paper on the bargain table.

"It's a shame," says he, "to sell a nice pattern like that fur only a cent a roll. Fur I paid eleven cents fur it wholesale. It jest seems to me as though I'm actin' contrary to ol' Jonathan's wishes too."

Poppy started taking the paper from the table.

"I think myself," says he, in sympathy with the old man, "that we ought to get more than that for it. So we'll hold it for ten cents at least. Or if you want me to, Pappy, I'll carry it home for you to keep."

"Oh, mercy me—*no!*" the old man cried excitedly, his eyes popping. "Fur if ma ever saw that paper comin' in the house she'd have seven cat fits. No, no! Don't ever think of bringin' it home, Poppy, unless you want us both to git scalped. Fur ma can be terribly pernickerty, when she wants to be."

Poppy laughed.

"Well, I'll put it over here," says he, "and you can do what you want to with it."

A boy from the news office came in at ten-thirty with the handbills, and when Poppy and I got back from peddling them, at eleven-thirty, old Pappy came running to meet us with the good news that he had sold all of the Abe Lincoln paper to Truman Sweet himself for twenty cents a roll.

"Yes, sir," the old man told us excitedly, all

a-tremble, "I got twenty cents a roll fur it. Truman give me a ten-dollar bill fur it."

"Let me see it," says Poppy quickly.

The old man fished the greenback out of his pocket.

"There it is," says he, still beaming. "A nice new ten-dollar bill."

Poppy looked it over suspiciously.

"I thought maybe it was a phoney," says he.

"But Truman Sweet wouldn't work off a bad bill on me," Pappy stiffened resentfully.

"I'm not so sure of that myself," Poppy muttered darkly.

"I think I could have sold him more of the paper too at the same price, if I'd had it in stock. Fur he kept askin' me over an' over ag'in if that was all I had."

"And that's the only kind he bought, huh?" Poppy's eyes narrowed.

"Yes."

"He didn't show any interest in any other?"

"No, he jest wanted that one partic'lar pattern —the Abe Lincoln pattern, he said. An' you can't imagine, Poppy," beamed the happy old man, "how glad I was to have *him* git it. It was almost like turnin' it over to good ol' Jonathan hisself. Fur Truman knows how his father valued it. He even had tears in his eyes when he come in here askin' fur it. He said he wanted to buy every roll that I had of it, jest in memory of his father."

"And you believed it, huh?" says Poppy, his face hardening.

"Why sartinly I believed it. An' don't you ever tell me ag'in that Truman Sweet is unfair, or liable to harm us in any way. He's the same true friend as his father."

Poppy got me off alone.

"I didn't have the heart to tell him, Jerry," he spoke in a low tense voice, "but he's just let a fortune slip through his fingers."

I saw instantly what he meant. And, boy!—did I feel sick!

"But how did Sweet find out that the money was hidden in the wall-paper here?" I asked dizzily.

"It's so easy now," says Poppy, completely disgusted with himself for his stupidity, "that I can't conceive how we ever missed it. For don't you remember what he kept muttering to himself that night in the attic, when we were spying on him?"

"He kept muttering—yes. But I couldn't make out anything."

"I thought at the time it sounded like Abe Lincoln. But I couldn't see any sense to it, and forgot all about it till just now—though if I'd kept my wits about me I would have remembered it yesterday when Pappy told us about that paper, and how old Jonathan Sweet liked it so well."

"But why did you say that Pappy had lost a

fortune?" I further puzzled. "For he wouldn't have kept the money if it belonged to the Sweets."

"But did it, Jerry? Do you know what I think now?"

"No—what?" I asked eagerly.

"I think the hidden money was put there purposely for Pappy himself. I think it was taken from his share of the profits."

I kept getting sicker ever minute.

"Gee! And we let it get away from us."

"Yes, that's what makes me so blamed sore," growled Poppy. "Oh, gosh! I could kick myself all over town for being so dumb."

"I wish we'd been here," says I, as miserable about it as he was, "when Sweet came in."

"Yes, with his crocodile tears!" Poppy's eyes blazed over the deceit. "They were tears of greed, Jerry!—that's what they were."

"But can't we do something about it?" says I desperately.

"What can we do?" Poppy spoke practically. "We can't even prove that there was money hidden there. And you know yourself that Sweet never would admit it, if he was tackled about it."

"But couldn't we find out at the bank?—if he came in there suddenly with a big wad of money? That ought to be proof."

"I don't think the bank would tell us a thing about his affairs. For it's none of their business how he gets his money. Besides, he practically

runs the bank himself. They wouldn't dare tell on him."

"But, Poppy," I further puzzled, "I don't understand yet why Jonathan Sweet ever hid the money that way. Do you?"

"Well, put yourself in his place, Jerry. You and Pappy are partners here, and like each other. But you can see that Pappy is too easy-going with his money. You hang onto every penny of your own share, and feel he should do the same, instead of letting his wife run through it. You figure, if things keep on that way, Pappy will wind up in the poorhouse in his old age. And to prevent that you start taking money from the till and hiding it. Not *your* money understand, but *his*. And you're hiding it so he'll have it after you're gone."

"I see. And when I'm dying I call him in and tell him I've been looking out for him, huh?"

"Yes, that's the way it looks to me, Jerry."

"But how was Pappy to know about the money in the wall-paper? Suppose he had sold the paper to somebody?"

"But you told him *not* to sell it."

"Yes, but suppose he had regardless?"

"Then the money would have quickly come to light when the wall-paper was being trimmed here."

"But if the money wasn't ever found that way, and the paper just laid here year after year, how was Pappy to know that the money was there when he needed it?"

"Well, how did Truman Sweet learn it was there? He can tell you more about that part than me, Jerry. But it looks to me as though he sidetracked some kind of instructions, thinking first that the money was hidden in his old house, but finally getting it through his scheming head that it was hidden here in the old Abe Lincoln wall-paper that his father had been so choice about."

"But if old Jonathan Sweet kept taking money that way, and hiding it, wouldn't it show in his bookkeeping?"

"Well, I'll ask Pappy some time if he ever had his old ledgers gone over by an expert. And maybe, Jerry, we *can* get something out of Truman Sweet that way. I'm glad you mentioned it. I never thought about the books myself."

We were talking in the back part of the store where a door gave on the alley. And hearing voices up in front now, Poppy hurried off to see if he could be of service.

The ledgers that I had mentioned were piled under Pappy's high bookkeeping desk. Just for fun I pulled one out and ran through it, thinking that maybe I could find some suspicious erasures or crossed-out figures in it. And it was my intention, when I came to the first erasure, to add up the figures there and see if the total that had been given for that day's business was correct. But I couldn't find a single erasure in the whole book. The figures seemed to be perfect.

And yet, as I continued to thumb through the

dusty yellow-edged book, I had the queer creepy feeling that the man who had put the figures there so painstakingly was standing over me, trying to point out something that would help us. There was something in the book—something that he had put there—that he wanted me to notice. And suddenly, as I kept on thumbing the pages, I made a startling discovery. It sent my heart popping up into my throat.

CHAPTER XIV

POPPY TAKES COMMAND

I WAS still going through the ledger, getting more excited every minute, when the back door suddenly opened, and in strode Truman Sweet with an armful of wall-paper.

"Sam!" he called sharply. "Come here. I want to see you."

"Yes, Truman," says Pappy, hurrying back. "What is it?"

"I've changed my mind about that wall-paper. And I wish you'd send someone out to get the rest of it out of my car. It's just outside, in the alley."

"Why—why, of course," faltered Pappy, surprised and disappointed. Then he turned to me. "Will you get it, Jerry, like a good boy?"

"Sure thing," I told him willingly.

"What's *he* doing here, Sam?" Sweet scowled darkly, as I quickly put the ledger back and scooted around him to the door to perform the errand.

"We're gettin' ready fur a sale this afternoon, an' he's bin helpin' with the stock. But wasn't

the paper satisfactory, Truman?" the old man asked anxiously.

"No," Sweet snapped. "And I want you to exchange it, or give me my money back."

"I'll gladly exchange it, Truman. But I thought, from what you said——"

"Never mind what I said," Sweet cut in sharply. "I know what I want."

"Of course, of course, Truman. But I—I *am* disappointed, if I may say so without intending offense. Fur your father thought *so* much of that pattern."

"And you're sure you haven't got more like it in the store, Sam?"

"You mean—more of the same pattern?" Pappy stared.

"Yes."

"But I don't understand. You jest said you didn't want it. An' now you say you *do* want it. Which do you mean, Truman?"

"I said I didn't want *that* lot. That's what I meant. But I would like to see more just like it, if you have it."

Gee! Did that mean, I asked myself excitedly, as I got the paper and got back in as quickly as I could to hear the rest, that he hadn't found the money after all? Or was he just looking for more?

"But let's take a look, Sam," I heard Sweet urging, when I came in. "For you may have more of it here some place."

Pappy was completely at sea.

"But this paper's in good shape, Truman. You must have noticed that yourself, fur I see you've unrolled it."

"How do you know I unrolled it?" Sweet growled, his eyes narrowing.

"It's rolled looser than when you got it."

"Humph! It looks the same to me. But shan't we go upstairs and look around?"

"I wouldn't know where to start lookin', Truman. Fur I've got thousands of rolls up there. It would take days to go through the whole stock. I can't understand——"

Sweet abruptly cut him off.

"Sam, what'll you take for your entire stock, just as it stands?"

Pappy stared, troubled by the thought of losing his whole business so quickly.

"But what'd I do if I sold it?" he faltered, trembling. "It's all I've got left, Truman. It's the only thing that stands between me an' the poorhouse."

"I want to start my son up in business here. I can use the stock. And I tell you what I'll do, Sam—I'll give you five hundred dollars spot cash for it."

"But I—I owe more than that," poor Pappy spoke helplessly. "I'd have to pay your brother his back rent. An' I wouldn't have a penny left."

"I'd advise you to take five hundred, Sam."

"Well, maybe I should," faltered the beaten old man, his spirit broken by his struggles. "But you better let me ask ma first."

"How much did you say you owe Martin?"

"Six hundred dollars. So you see, Truman, if I sold out to you fur five hundred, I'd still be one hundred dollars in debt."

"And I suppose you know that Martin's on his deathbed?"

Tears welled Pappy's kindly eyes.

"Yes, so I jest heard. Poor Martin! He's bin very patient with me, Truman."

"When he goes, this store and his entire estate, such as it is, will be mine. And I'm going to make it a point to see that his outstanding debts are collected in full."

"But, Truman——"

"Now, I don't want to be harsh with you, Sam. For old times can't be completely forgotten. I'm conscious of the bond between our families. But even so, you know yourself that you had no right to keep on here, month after month, and let the rent pile up that way. Six hundred dollars is a lot of money. I can't afford to lose it."

"But, Truman!—Martin isn't gone yet," Pappy spoke, pained.

"He's as good as gone," was the heartless reply. "So there's no use hedging about the matter. I want the store and the stock. And the sooner we close the deal the better for both sides."

"But if I sell out to you fur five hundred dollars, how in the world can I ever pay you the other hundred? Fur the store's my only source of income, Truman."

"I'll be willing to take some of your wife's

furniture for the balance," came the greedy suggestion. "She's got an old sofa that I'll gladly take, to accommodate you."

Poor Pappy! If he had been lashed with a whip he couldn't have suffered worse.

"No, no," he cried hoarsely, covering his face with his gnarled hands, as though to shut out some terrible torturing picture. "No, Truman. You mustn't take any of ma's furniture. It would break her heart."

"But you've got to pay your debts somehow," Sweet kept on relentlessly.

"Yes, yes, I know. I want to pay my debts if I can. But give me a little time to think it over, Truman. I'll let you know this afternoon."

"I want to know now," Sweet spoke harshly.

And just as in the attic that night, his face, as he looked around at the stacks of wall-paper, was more like a greedy old wolf's than a man's. Which convinced me that the money was still here. That's why he was so eager to buy the stock. And how lovely for him if he could get it for five hundred dollars, and later find ten or twenty times that amount hidden in it, on top of getting another thousand or two out of it when he and his smart son sold it.

Pappy tottered to a seat.

"I never thought you'd press me that way, Truman," he dabbed pathetically at his faded watery eyes, completely broken up. "I was so happy when you bought your father's wall-paper. It made me feel that things were turnin' fur the

better fur me. But you've taken all the hope out of me now."

Red suddenly popped in the back door.

"Hoo-hoo, Poppy!" he boomed, banging the door behind him.

Sweet almost jumped out of his shoes.

"Is it necessary for you to bang the door that way?" he went at Red furiously.

Red looked at me.

"What day is it, Jerry?" says he.

"Wednesday," says I.

"Wednesday?" says he, surprised. "Why, I thought it was Tuesday."

And going back he banged the door again, almost knocking it off its hinges this time.

"That's the way I bang it on Wednesday," says he, dusting his hands with a big air.

Sweet was mad enough at him to wring his neck.

"Do you know what I'd do to you," he grated, his eyes spitting hatred, "if you were my son?"

"What?" says Red indifferently.

"I'd give you poison."

"Yes," was Red's quick retort, "and if I was your son I'd take it."

Sweet turned, livid, to old Pappy.

"Sam, can't you get rid of these boys so we can talk undisturbed? For we've got to settle that rent matter right now. I've dilly-dallied with you long enough. And I can tell you too that it isn't going to help your case a bit to have these hoodlums hanging around you."

Poppy came running with a scrubbing pail and mop.

"Excuse me, Mr. Sweet," says he, as he started swishing the water around, "but we've got to clean up back here before the big sale starts."

Red had his eyes on Sweet's patent leather shoes.

"Oh, Poppy, let me mop," he begged, reaching eagerly for the mop.

"Yes, take it," Poppy gave it up briskly. "For I've got other work to do. And, Jerry, you can come over here and help me, if you want to."

"How much of the floor do you want me to mop, Poppy?" Red boomed, swishing ambitiously.

"All around there where Mr. Sweet stands."

"And will you please move your number elevens, Mr. Sweet?" Red asked sweetly, with another wicked swish.

Sweet jumped to save his shoes.

"But please don't stand *there,* Mr. Sweet," says Poppy, bumping into him busily with an armful of wall-paper. "For you're right in my way now."

Poppy knew, of course, what had been going on in the back of the store. And it was his scheme now to make it so lively back there for old Sweet that he would be only too glad to get out, thus saving old Pappy from further immediate persecution.

"And what do you want me to do?" I asked, eager to get in on the fun.

"You can mop awhile if you want to," Red told me, taking another expert swish at the patent leathers.

"No, Red," Poppy spoke quickly, "I want Jerry to help me move this wall-paper, if Mr. Sweet will kindly step out of the way. You go on with the mopping."

"O-k," says Red, swishing.

"You boys seem to be terribly busy back here all of a sudden," Sweet growled darkly, as the commotion around him grew.

"Well, we've got to get all cleaned up for the sale this afternoon," says Poppy, on the jump.

Red smacked the scrubbing pail with his mop, the water shooting right and left.

"What's the matter?" Poppy asked quickly.

"A mosquito," boomed Red. "I tried to swat him with the mop."

"You little fool!" thundered Sweet, wiping his splattered trousers. "Look what you did then."

"Oh, oh!" says Red, letting out his neck. "Did I get some of it on you, Mr. Sweet? Excuse me."

And then, with a yell like a raving maniac, he made another smack at the pail.

"That blamed mosquito!" he boomed. "I'll get him yet."

Poppy bumped into Sweet from behind with more wall-paper.

"Oh, excuse me, Mr. Sweet," says he.

Then I came along and bumped him.

"Oh, excuse me, Mr. Sweet," says I.

"Will you quit that?" he shoved back at me, boiling now.

There was another wild screech from Red, as he took after the imaginary mosquito.

"There he goes!" he boomed, smacking the air with his mop, the water flying.

"Hey!" squealed Sweet, ducking. "Look out where you're swinging that mop, you brainless little idiot."

Gosh! He would have gotten it square in the face next, I believe, if a sudden crash from the alley hadn't diverted Red's attention. For when old red-top gets going that way he doesn't care a rap for anybody or anything. He's a perfect scream.

"Oh, oh!" says he, at the sudden crash, blinking comically. "Somebody's pretty little auto fenders got an awful smack that time. Were you listening, Mr. Sweet?"

I would have followed Sweet out, to see the damage, if Red hadn't stopped me.

"Don't be dumb," says he, grinning from ear to ear. "It was just the Rail kid rolling an ash can around."

"And did you tell him to do it?" I stared.

"Sure thing. Poppy and I had it all planned.

"I thought sure it was Sweet's car," says I.

"Yes," laughed Red, "so did he. And did I ever make him jump when I smacked the water pail. Oh, boy, oh, boy! That's the most fun

I've had since the winter Aunt Pansy had the mumps, and tried to eat a pickle."

Poppy was trying to hurry Pappy into a closet.

"But what good'll it do me to hide in the closet, Poppy?" demurred the dazed old man, despairingly. "That won't save me."

"No, but it'll give us a chance to think up something to help you," Poppy spoke quickly. "For don't you imagine for one instant that we're going to let that old skinflint gyp you out of your stock, or take any of Granny's nice furniture away from her."

"You're right about him, Poppy," the old man spoke brokenly. "But I—I never dreamed he'd turn on me that way."

"I knew what he was all along," declared Poppy. "That's why I insisted on going out to see his brother."

"It seems like the whole world is crumblin' around me. I—I don't even feel sure of ol' Jonathan hisself any more. Fur if I was fooled in one maybe I was fooled in the other."

"Well, I've got a lot to tell you about your old partner, Pappy. You'll like it too. But I can't tell you now—there isn't time. You'll just have to trust me till we get rid of Sweet. And you *do* trust me, don't you?"

"Yes, Poppy, you an' ma are all I've got left—you're all I've got to depend on."

"Well, that's fine!" beamed Poppy. "And now let me put this stool in the closet for you.

There! You can take it nice and easy now. Try it, Pappy. Go on."

"I never thought I'd see the day that I'd be hidin' like this in my own clothes closet," grunted the old man, still opposed to the idea.

"Well, if you don't hide," says Poppy, "you're going to be sorry. For that's the only way I can think of to save you for the present."

"Oh, all right, all right," the old man went in unwillingly.

Red was watching at the back door.

"Here he comes, Poppy! You better hurry."

"Yes, Pappy!—get your big feet in quick, so I can shut the door. That's it. And now, fellows, get busy and act just as though nothing had happened."

"And can I sock him in the puss this time?" Red asked eagerly, sozzling the mop in the pail to get it nice and soggy.

"No—you leave him to me. I'll handle him alone this time."

"Oh, let me sock him just once," begged Red. "Please, Poppy."

"I think you did enough before," laughed Poppy. "But here he comes now—so get busy everybody."

CHAPTER XV

THE DOTS IN THE LEDGER

Poppy let Sweet think, when he stormed in again, that old Pappy had gone home to dinner.

"But why didn't he wait till after we got that deal settled?" Sweet asked angrily. "For he knew I didn't want it to lag. So why didn't he wait here for me?"

"I suppose he got hungry," says Poppy. "For it's getting pretty close to dinner-time."

Sweet's eyes narrowed meanly.

"And I don't suppose, by any chance, that you hurried him off?"

"*Me?*" Poppy spoke innocently. "Why, he knows enough to go home to dinner without me hurrying him off."

Sweet glanced at his watch.

"Humph!" he grunted. "It's time I was going home myself. But I'll be back at four o'clock for my final answer. And if Sam Paisley knows when he's well off he'll take the five hundred dollars I offered him and get out of here for good. For he's going out anyway as soon as I get legal control here. I don't fool around with poor trash like him, when once I've set my mind on a

thing. People dealing with me either do as I say, or suffer the consequences. You boys better remember that too, particularly you, Poppy Ott. For I know who's the ringleader here."

"Are you trying to scare me?" Poppy asked pleasantly. "Or are you just exercising your lower jaw?"

"My son told me how you tried to pick a fight with him the day you moved. But let me tell you this, you quarrelsome little tough: If you ever lay a finger on my son, I'll fight you to the last court in the land."

But Poppy just laughed at him.

"Don't you worry about me laying a finger on him, Mr. Sweet. When I get ready to even scores with that bird I'm going to use both fists on him. And when I get through with him you'll think somebody dumped a lot of rotten hash on your front porch."

Sweet's eyes glittered like a cornering snake's.

"You like to meddle in other people's affairs, don't you?" he grated.

"You can call it meddling if you like," Poppy shrugged indifferently. "But sometimes poor people need protection from men like you."

"And so you've set yourself up as Sam Paisley's personal protector, eh? And you're going to save his store for him! You're going to put on sales and bring the business back! Well, you won't be here long, I can tell you that, you conceited little upstart! For you're both going out of here this afternoon for good."

"That's what you think," says Poppy.

"Sam was a fool ever to listen to you in the first place. For you couldn't put this business back on its feet no matter how you tried, or anybody else. For all you've got here is trash."

"Then why are you so eager to buy it?" Poppy asked slyly.

"I want the store building for my son. We're going to start a real store here."

"But if you just want the building," Poppy added craftily, "I still don't see why you're so anxious to get the stock too."

"I just made Sam that offer to help him," came the smooth hypocritical lie. "It wasn't that I actually wanted the stock."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say that," beamed Poppy. "Now we'll just move the stock some place else, when you get ready to oust us, and keep on selling it."

"Oh, no you won't!" snapped Sweet, his heavy eyebrows coming down like the jaws of a steel trap. "You and Sam are going out of here this afternoon and leave everything just as it is. For I've made up my mind to that. And don't think either that I've been fooled by all this sudden mopping and shoving around here. For I know whose side you boys are on. But you'll find you haven't gained anything by it."

"But you can't make us sell out to you if we don't want to, Mr. Sweet. For we don't owe you a penny yet. And when it comes right down to brass tacks, you haven't as much right in this

store right now as we have. For you haven't inherited it yet, remember. Instead of you putting us out, we could put you out if we wanted to."

"Are you going to urge Sam Paisley to hold out against me?" Sweet leveled his eyes meanly at Poppy.

"I most certainly am," Poppy stood his ground.

"I'll ruin you for this, you meddlesome little brat! I'll drive you and that thick-headed father of yours out of town."

"Just a minute, Mr. Sweet," Poppy spoke evenly, his own eyes snapping now. "I don't care what you say about me. For the opinion of a man like you doesn't bother me at all. It's just so much wind. But you better be careful what you say about my dad. Or the first thing you know I may grab that mop handle of Red's and start playing a tune on your bald head."

"You insufferable little brat!"

"And now that we've got to talking nice and frank to each other," continued Poppy, "let me tell you this: *I* know why you bought that wallpaper this morning—you thought there was money hidden in it. I know who hid the money too, that you've been searching for for the past two weeks—it was your own father. And what's more I know why the money was hidden—it was hidden for old Pappy. And *you* tried to steal it on him."

"It's a lie," Sweet screamed, ashen now.

"And do you want me to tell you something

more?" Poppy went on. "Well, you listen to this, you big wind-bag: Even if your brother should die to-day, you can't put us out of here inside of a week. And do you know what we'll be doing all that week? Well, every roll of wall-paper in the store is going through the trimmer. And every dollar that drops out we're going to keep. Now, how do you like that, mister blow-hard? Do you think that'll curdle your coffee for you this noon?"

Sweet saw that he had met his match and changed his tactics.

"What do you want for the stock?" he asked shortly.

"It isn't for sale," says Poppy, turning away uninterested.

"I'll give you a thousand dollars cash."

"Nothin' doin'."

"Fifteen hundred."

"You're just wasting your breath."

"Two thousand."

"No."

"You better think twice before you reject that offer. For I'm making it on a gamble, as I haven't the slightest proof that there's actually any money hidden here."

"But there *is* money hidden some place—you admit that, huh?"

"If there is," Sweet snapped, tight-lipped, "it's mine."

"Oh, no it isn't," says Poppy, sure of himself. "It's Pappy Paisley's. And I'd be willing to bet

the skin on my nose that it's right here in this store too."

"If you find it," cried Sweet, crazed by the thought of losing it, greedy old wolf that he was, "I'll sue you for it."

"Well, go ahead and sue us if you want to," bluffed Poppy, feeling that he still held the whip hand. "But we've got proof that it's Pappy's. It's money of his that your father took out of the cash register and hid for him."

Sweet walked the length of the store and back again to quiet his nerves.

"I'll give you three thousand dollars for the stock," he bid again.

"No," says Poppy.

"Thirty-five hundred then."

I could hear old Pappy sort of gasping to himself in the closet. He even opened the door a crack to signal to Poppy to close the deal. But Poppy just kept on shaking his head.

"Thirty-five hundred dollars isn't enough."

"Thirty-five hundred dollars is a lot of money, especially to a man in Sam's reduced circumstances. And he better take it, and be sure of it, instead of gambling on finding more."

"Do you know how much wall-paper we've got here?" Poppy asked, motioning around.

"You've got more than you ever can sell—I know that," growled Sweet.

"There's a half million rolls here at least. And at only a cent a roll that figures up to five thousand dollars."

"But you haven't got the five thousand dollars yet. Remember, it's me that's taking the chances."

Poppy laughed scornfully.

"Oh, no, Mr. Sweet! You never took a chance in your whole life. That's how you got so much money together. You're just as sure now that the money's hidden here as you are that you've got feet. So wouldn't we be foolish to sell out to you for thirty-five hundred dollars, and lose the hidden money too? You must think we're Santa Claus."

"Well," Sweet made a peak offer, "if you're so sure the stock's worth five thousand dollars, I'll pay you that amount for it, and cancel the back rent besides. That'll leave Sam with five thousand dollars clear money. But you've got to agree to turn the store over to me right away."

I thought sure that that would bring old Pappy palpitating from the closet. But there was a sudden dead silence there. It scared me.

Poppy, I guess, had the same anxious thought. For he got rid of Sweet as quickly as he could, promising to give the final offer consideration. And when we finally got to old Pappy, there he sat slumped over in a dead faint.

We were still working on the ashen old man with cold water and a fan when Granny came flying in to find out why he hadn't come home to dinner. For it was after twelve now.

"Pappy!" she screamed at sight of him on the

floor, running to him. "Oh, Pappy! Speak to me!"

"He'll be all right in a minute or two," Poppy told her quickly, as he bathed the old man's temples. "He just fainted."

"Well, let me have the water," she reached for it in her brisk capable way. "For I know what to do. And goodness me! Just look at those dirty ears! Why, Pappy Paisley, if you aren't the untidiest person I ever saw in all my life."

All the time her tongue was running she was digging in the dirty ears! And frightened as I was by the old man's spell, I had to grin. For I never had heard of anybody before getting their ears washed in a dead faint.

Presently Pappy began to stir.

"Is that you, ma?" he mumbled, dazed.

"Pappy, do you know you never washed your ears this morning?"

"Thunderation!" exploded the old man. And brusquely brushing her aside he scrambled to his feet.

"But, Pappy, you haven't told me yet why you fainted," says she, as she took a final dab at him with the wash cloth.

"I guess that big offer of Truman Sweet's was too much fur me," he laughed nervously.

"What offer? What do you mean?" Granny asked sharply.

"Truman was jest in here a few minutes ago, ma. An' he's goin' to buy our entire stock.

Ain't he, Poppy? Didn't he tell you so, jest before I fainted?"

"Yes," Poppy nodded, "that's what he wants to do."

"Well, he can't have it," Granny snapped her lips together.

"But, ma——"

"I said *no*. I don't know what he told you or offered you or anything else about it. But we're all through dealing with the Sweets. For I know what one of 'em did to us. And this other one's even worse. I wouldn't trust *him* as far as I could throw a full-grown elephant."

"But wait a minute, ma," the old man's anger arose. "Sufferin' codfish! You run on like a talkin' machine. Can't you hold in till I tell you a little sense? He offered us five thousand dollars fur the stock, didn't he, Poppy?"

"Yes, and you're to let him know this afternoon if you and Granny accept."

"Of course we accept," says Pappy quickly.

"Well, maybe we will and maybe we won't," Granny spoke for herself, in her set way. "For I've got to know more about this matter before you get any consent out of me."

"Now, ma—" the irritated old man began.

"And you needn't start getting on your high horse either, Pappy Paisley," she laid it off to him with a stiff finger. "For the big trouble in the past was that I didn't step in here often enough. We'd 'a' gotten more out of the business if I had. For I never would have let that

tricky old Jonathan Sweet cheat me blind, like he did you. And now you've got that scallawag son of his chasing after you, with some kind of a trick up his sleeve."

"You're partly right about Mr. Sweet, Granny," Poppy told her gravely. "For there *is* a catch to his offer. And you two'll have to decide whether to take the five thousand dollars he's offered, which is a sure thing, or start searching for what may be a much bigger amount of money that was hidden here for you years ago."

Granny stared, incredulous.

"Hidden here by who?" she asked.

"The man you suspected of robbing the cash register."

"Jonathan Sweet?"

"Yes," Poppy nodded. "He *did* take money day after day. But the money never went into his own pocket, as you thought. He wanted to make sure that you and Pappy were provided for in your old age. So he hid the money for you here in the store. That's really why Truman Sweet wants to get in here now. He must think too that there's a great deal more than five thousand dollars hidden here, or he wouldn't have offered that. For he isn't the kind to make rash offers."

"Mercy me!" gasped the dumfounded old lady, staring. "Is this true?"

Poppy then put the whole picture puzzle together for the amazed couple, piece by piece. Every piece fit too. Sweet's greedy search

"THERE HE GOES!" RED BOOMED, SMACKING THE AIR WITH HIS MOP——

proved first that there was hidden money. Sensible deductions proved next that it was money that Jonathan Sweet had taken, maybe not wisely but still nobly, from the cash register. The purchase of the Abe Lincoln wall-paper, coming on top of the earlier wall-paper incidents, proved where the money had been hidden. Jonathan Sweet's final words to his partner helped to complete the picture. "Don't let anybody turn you against me, Sam, not even your wife, for I've been looking out for you in your old age in ways you don't even suspect." All this, and now Truman Sweet's big offer for the stock, meant just one thing: There *was* hidden money here, and probably a lot of it.

"Oh, dear!" says Granny, bewildered. "I don't know what to do. What do you think we ought to do, Pappy?"

"Accept the five thousand dollars, of course," was Pappy's prompt reply.

"But suppose there's more here?"

"We don't know that there's a penny hidden here for sure. It's jest a theory."

"Oh, but I think there is, Pappy. And if dear old Jonathan hid only five dollars a day that would be fifteen hundred dollars a year. In ten years that would be fifteen thousand dollars. Oh, mercy me, Pappy!" her excitement grew. "We mustn't sell. No, we mustn't. For it's our money. And Truman Sweet has no right to it."

I ran then and got the ledger that I had been looking in earlier.

"I can tell you how much Jonathan Sweet took on September 20th, 1906," I said, drawing amazed attention to myself.

"How much?" Granny asked eagerly.

"Six dollars," says I. "And the next day he took eight."

"But how can you tell?" Poppy jumped to look at the book.

"Well, look at those inked dots," says I, pointing. "They're all through the book. See? Here's eleven for the 14th of November. They must mean something. And I think they mean dollars. For you couldn't roll up half dollars or quarters in wall-paper."

"You're right, Jerry," Poppy agreed excitedly. "It's dollars, all right—paper dollars. And now the thing to do is to get an adding machine and find out just how many dots there are here. Boy!— that sure was clever of old Jonathan Sweet. I thought this morning, Pappy, that your luck was all gone. I thought Truman Sweet had all the luck on his side. But just as you said, your old partner is still looking out for you. His spirit is right here with us this very minute. We can't see it. But if we could I bet you we'd find it grinning from ear to ear."

CHAPTER XVI

POPPY OTT & CO.

WE BORROWED an adding machine that afternoon from the next-door grocer, and Granny and I added the ledger dots while Pappy and Poppy took care of the trade, with Red down in the basement trimming.

I was kind of awkward with the adding machine at first, never having used one before. But after a little bit I got the hang of it. And from then on I put the dots into it clickety-clickety-click. It sure was an easy way to add, and fast too.

There was a separate ledger for each year, with the oldest one at the bottom of the pile. But it wasn't till we got up to 1899 that we began to find dots. When we finished that ledger, with Granny reading off the daily dots to me and me clicking them into the machine, there was a total of six hundred and forty-seven in the dials.

I put that down on a separate paper. And when we got through here's what I had:

1899	647	dots
1900	962	"
1901	1006	"
1902	942	"
1903	802	"
1904	760	"
1905	880	"
1906	960	"
1907	1088	"
1908	1011	"
1909	1046	"
1910	1102	"
1911	998	"
1912	162	"
Total	12,366	dots (or $12,366.00)

Jonathan Sweet had died in March, 1912, which explains why there were so few dots for that year. But altogether he had put a pile of dots into the old ledgers, thus providing an accurate daily record of the business throughout his connection with it, even though he had slipped money out day after day.

Pappy waggled doubtfully when shown the big total.

"I hope you're right," says he, unenthused himself. "I hope it's dollars, as you say. But I've got to see the money to really believe it."

But dear old Granny had no such doubts herself.

"Twelve thousand dollars!" says she, her eyes

shining like twin stars. "Now I can have a new electric ice box, thanks to dear old Jonathan."

Poppy smiled.

"Well, I wouldn't advise you to buy the ice box yet," says he dryly.

But to Granny the money was just as good as in her pocket.

"I need a new electric sewing machine too," she ran on, the happiest old soul that I ever had seen in all my life, "and some new inner-spring mattresses. Oh, it's so good to have money again! I feel like a new person."

"Well, you know what I think about it," says Pappy, as he shuffled off to wait on a customer. "I'll believe it when I see it."

A sudden wild whoop from Red sent Poppy and me flying down there, expecting to find him wading in one-dollar bills clear up to his knees. But instead he was poking gingerly in a cluttered corner.

"I just saw a rat," says he.

The big egg!

"Shall we wring his neck, Jerry?" Poppy growled, disgusted.

"Sure—let's," says I.

"And what's the matter with you guys?" Red asked, surprised.

"We thought you'd found the money," says I.

Old Pappy poked his head down.

"There's some customers waitin', Poppy."

"O-k," says Poppy, bounding up the stairs.

"An' have you got Mrs. Custer's order ready

yet, Donald?" the old man further called down.

"It will be in a minute," says Red, jumping back to the trimmer.

"Let me do it," says I, taking the crank from him.

"There ought to be a motor on it," he spoke wearily. "For it gets blamed tiresome after an hour or two."

"Well, why don't you go ahead and put a motor on it?" says I, spinning away, with the wall-paper unwinding at one end and rewinding at the other. "For you like to monkey with motors."

"I believe I will to-morrow," says he, brightening. "For we've got an old water-pump motor at home that'll be just the thing."

Everything sold now went through the trimmer. Even where a customer wanted the paper left rough it was run through just the same, with the cutting rolls raised, which made a lot of work. And I could easily see the advantage of a motor like Red had suggested.

"Well, there you are," I told him, as the last roll spun around, finished.

Getting the order together he rushed it upstairs to the customer, telling me, when he got back, that Truman Sweet had just come in for his answer.

The deal was out of Poppy's hands now. Nor would he advise the old couple one way or the other. Pappy himself, still of little faith in the dots or the suspected cache, wanted to take the five thousand dollars and thus play safe. A bird

in the hand, he quoted, was worth two in the bush. But dear old Granny had been born with the lure of the hunt strong within her, I guess. For to all of Sweet's blandishments and Pappy's earnest appeals she turned a deaf ear. Sell out for a paltry five thousand dollars, when the stock alone was worth that much, and lose that twelve thousand dollars? Never, never would they get her to consent to any such ridiculous sacrifice as that.

In the end Sweet left raging, threatening to attach the stock for the back rent and thus legally take it away from the old couple. But that, we knew, was a premature gesture. For he couldn't do anything till his brother died. And even then there would be a delay in our favor. For when a man dies you can't simply jump right in at his last breath and start ordering his tenants out, or attaching their property for back rent. Matters like that have to go through the courts, which always takes some time.

The sale drew hundreds of local women to the store that afternoon, the most of them coming out of curiosity. They couldn't conceive that the wall-paper, as advertised at a penny a roll, would be worth taking home. Still they wanted to see it, however flimsy it might be. And when they found out that much of it had been sold earlier for as high as thirty cents a double roll, they began pawing through it madly, each afraid that the other would get the choicest patterns.

The wall-paper, at a penny a roll, *was* an out-

standing bargain—there's no doubt about that. Pappy lost money on every roll that went out. But it was better to sell it for a part of its worth than never to sell it at all. Besides, many of the customers thus attracted to the store picked out other patterns, at three and four cents a roll. So in all the sale was very much worth while.

One woman from the south side bought so much of the bargain paper that she could hardly wedge into her car to drive home. She had enough wall-paper to last her the rest of her life-time, she said happily. Other women picked up odd rolls here and there to paper the inside of chests and closets.

In all we took in over forty-two dollars, selling a total of three thousand two hundred rolls, which was the biggest single day's business that the store had done in many years. Granny was up in the clouds. And on top of the new ice box and inner-spring mattresses, she now began talking of a new fireplace. All her life, she said, her eyes glowing, she had wanted a parlor fireplace for the family cat to purr in front of. A cat on the hearth looked *so* homelike, she said. And with all this money coming in from the stock, and thousands more just waiting to be uncovered, why shouldn't she have a fireplace?

More than half of the wall-paper sold that afternoon had yet to be trimmed and delivered, for Red couldn't begin to keep up with the rush while it was on. So Poppy and I came back after supper, trimming by turns till almost midnight, at

which time Mother gave me my orders over the phone to start for home immediately or she'd come after me with a switch. But when Dad heard where I was, and what I was doing, he came down to get me with the car, treating me to a nice big ham sandwich and a slab of cherry pie on the way home.

Yes, sir, in all it was a big day!—just about the biggest, busiest and most exciting that I ever had known. And when I finally got to sleep that night I could see trimmers and dots whizzing all around the room.

The report got out overnight (through Red's talkative aunt, I believe!) that Jonathan Sweet had hidden a fortune in one-dollar bills in his old wall-paper, which brought another flood of buyers the following day, all pawing through the stock for the oldest patterns. But the rush soon tapered off when the further report got around that we were running everything through the trimmer (now motored) to find the money ourselves. After that we were pestered to death by people asking us nosily how much we had found. We got sick and tired of it, and of the old snoops hanging around watching. We were afraid too that some of the wall-paper would get out of the store without being searched. So it was agreed, when the week was done, to close up and keep closed up till the money was found. For its recovery was a whole lot more important right now than sales.

Word came to town Monday that Martin

Sweet, who already had lasted much longer than any of those around him had thought he possibly could, was sinking fast. He was bound to go in another hour or two, we were told. And realizing the importance of getting organized now against Truman Sweet, Poppy got us together in the back part of the store to talk things over.

We had the front curtains down, with a door sign reading: CLOSED FOR INVENTORY. But even so, we could hear the old-fashioned latch click every few minutes, the more snoopy ones unable to keep away.

"Well, what is it, Poppy?" Granny asked tersely, impatient to get to work. "What do you want to say to us? Let's hear it."

"It's about the stock," says Poppy gravely. "We'll never be able to sell it in the short time that Sweet'll allow us here. So we've got to figure out a place to move it to. And even more important, we've got to figure out some sure way of saving it from him."

"But won't everything be all right," Granny spoke trustfully, "when we find the money? For then we can pay the back rent, saving ourselves an attachment."

"Yes, but suppose we don't find the money soon enough? Suppose that Sweet attaches the stock first?"

Pappy was shuffling about, troubled.

"I don't think myself that we'll ever find a penny," says he, with less confidence in the scheme every minute.

"Oh, rats!" sputtered Granny, her own faith unshaken. "Of course we will—only it won't be pennies we find, it'll be paper dollars."

"Well, you've bin at it several days now, an' you hain't found nothin' yet," waggled the old man."

"But that's nothing to discourage us," Granny turned the remark off lightly. "For you couldn't expect dear old Jonathan to put the money right out in plain sight, for anybody to pick up. He wanted it for *us*. So he put it away in some safe place. And we'll just have to keep on looking for it till we find it, that's all."

"Five thousand dollars!" suffered the old man, thinking of the rejected offer. "Oh, dear, oh, dear! With that we could 'a' felt safe the rest of our lives. An' you made me turn it down!"

"Yes, and I'm glad I did," Granny stuck firmly to her position. "For five thousand dollars doesn't begin to look as good to me as seventeen thousand dollars—which is what we'll get in the end. Anyway, suppose we never found a penny, as you say. We'd still get the five thousand dollars out of the stock, wouldn't we? So what have we got to lose?"

"We ain't got the five thousand yet," the old man muttered.

"Yes, but look what you did last week, Pappy. In just one day you took in fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars is a long ways from five thousand dollars, ma. An' I tell you ag'in——"

"Well, you needn't tell me again," she snapped

him off, all out of patience with him, "for I don't want to hear it. And was there anything more, Poppy? If so, let's get it over with as soon as we can, for I want to get to hunting."

"Well, it's going to be just too bad for us," Poppy continued gravely, "if Truman Sweet gets to us with an attachment before we find the money. And I've been wondering if we couldn't turn the stock over to some trustworthy friend, like Jerry's father, for safekeeping."

"You mean—turn it over to him till we find the money?"

"Yes," Poppy nodded. "We'll still handle it, of course—there won't be any change there. He'll just hold it in his name to save it for us from old Sweet."

"But would he be willing?"

"I think so. Don't you, Jerry?"

"Sure thing. Or your pa'd be just as good. For my pa isn't the only square-shooter around here."

"But does it have to be a man?" pressed Granny.

"Not necessarily. Jerry's ma'll do just as well, if you'd rather have her."

"I wasn't thinking of a woman. I was just wondering, Poppy, so long as you've been so helpful to us and we have so much confidence in you, if we couldn't turn the stock over to you yourself."

"But wouldn't you rather have a man, like Jerry's dad?"

"No, I'd rather have you, if you think it's legal."

"Well, I don't know why it wouldn't be legal," Poppy considered. "For certainly you've got just as much right to sell wall-paper to me as to anyone else, big or small. But of course we'd have to make out a regular bill of sale. And I suppose I'd have to pay you a dollar anyway, to make the deal binding."

"All right then," Granny decided the matter quickly, "we'll do that. You and Pappy can go over to a lawyer and have the necessary papers made out—for we don't want any mistakes. And in the meantime Jerry and I'll go on with the hunt."

"And is that satisfactory to you, Pappy?" Poppy asked gravely.

"Why, I—I s'pose so," faltered the old man, with a helpless air. "I s'pose it's all right, if ma says so. Fur she always has her own way anyway. But I—I never thought I'd ever be turnin' my stock over to a boy."

"Well, don't do it," says Poppy quickly, "if you think I'm too young. For as Jerry said, you can get my pa or his pa."

"No," Granny put in firmly, "we want *you,* and nobody else. That's settled. And from now on it's Poppy Ott & Co., Interior Decorators."

Poppy Ott & Co., Interior Decorators! That sounded big. I think Poppy kind of liked it too. For he flushed, pleased.

But he didn't know what was coming. Oh, oh!

CHAPTER XVII

BIG NEWS

MOTHER told me when I popped in to supper Monday night that Miss Lindsley had been in and out hurriedly that afternoon. She had a crew at work at Crayden Towers. But oddly she hadn't said a word to Mother about old Pappy or about my recent letter to her. Which kind of hurt me. For I thought, at the very least, after coming into our home that way with such warm expressions of friendship and even getting me to propose to her, that she might have come around to the store for a few minutes' talk with me.

Pappy needed the work too, to take his mind off his growing troubles. For the money didn't come to light as quickly as we had thought it would. He went around muttering to himself about the rejected offer, and shaking his head over it.

Then, as expected, old Sweet breezed in one day with a lantern-jawed lawyer who served papers on us to get out. Sweet thought too that he could make some arrangement to take over the stock then and there, but raged out as before

when told that the store was now running under a new name. It wasn't the Paisley Paint & Wall-paper Co. any more, he was told, shown the bill of sale, but Poppy Ott & Co., Interior Decorators.

We had just ten days left in the old store, the limit allowed us under the law, and with Sweet now taking bitter steps in the courts to attach Pappy's home for the back rent, the search behind locked doors continued with increasing intensity day after day, the pile of wall-paper growing bigger at one end of the trimmer and smaller at the other. Then about two weeks after Martin Sweet's funeral, and within two days of our limit there, we came to the very last roll. I'll never forget the beseeching almost begging look in Granny's wan face as I threaded the roll into the trimmer and snapped on the motor. Pappy and Poppy were there too, long-faced, both watching anxiously as the roll unwound at one end and rewound at the other. But there was nothing in it. We had been through every roll of wall-paper in the store now, upstairs and down. But there was nothing in any of them. Either the money was hidden some place else, had inadvertently fallen into some customer's hands, or the whole thing, the ledger dots and all, was just a notion of ours after all, as old Pappy had contended from the first.

Poppy for once in his life was completely stumped.

"What do you think of it, Jerry?" he asked

me, bewildered, when we were alone, the two old folks having gone home tearful and broken.

"Well, whatever *you* think is good enough for me," I shrugged helplessly. For certainly I couldn't see into it very far myself. Everything had looked hunky-dory for us for awhile. And how big Poppy had talked to old Sweet then! But now everything was hash for us.

"But what do you think about the money?" Poppy persisted. "Do you really think there's money here? Or have we just been kidding ourselves?"

"Well, if we have, Sweet has too," I told him. "For certainly *he* thinks there's money here, or he did when he made that offer."

"You're right," Poppy waggled, with renewed vigor. "There *is* money here. His actions prove it. But, gosh!—you can't get any sense out of his actions. For he started looking for the money in that old attic. He thought sure it was there. Then he thought sure it was in the wall. He thought sure it was in that old Abe Lincoln wallpaper too. And then he was so sure it was in the rest of the stock some place that he was willing to gamble five thousand dollars on it. He's been disappointed in everything he tried. And he would have been disappointed in the stock too if we hadn't beat him to it—like a lot of dumb clucks!"

"Yes," I spoke regretfully, "it's too bad old Pappy didn't sell it when he had the chance.

"Well, that's Granny's doings, not mine thankfully. For I wouldn't tell him yes or no myself, though I was glad at the time that he didn't sell. For I thought sure the money was here."

"Do you suppose it's hidden in the floor?" says I. "For Sweet looked in the attic floor. And he must be getting his hunches from some place."

"Well, we'll look when we move out. But I've just about given up all hope myself."

Pappy had partly spoken for a little store around the corner. But when we went around to look at it we found a cobbler in it. And failing to find another place, in the short time allowed us, we finally had to move into old Pappy's barn, the wall-paper, bins, paint, counters, trimmer and everything else. Which looked to me like the beginning of the end. For I couldn't conceive that we ever could do a paying business in an old barn like that. For whoever heard of anybody going to a barn to buy wall-paper?

The same drayman who had moved Poppy moved the stock, old Pappy shakily paying the bill out of the fast diminishing sale money. And when the building had been emptied we went over the floor almost inch by inch. But nowhere could we find a floor board that looked as though it had been raised to put something under it. Nor could we find any loose stones in the basement wall, or anything in the rubbish down there. And satisfied now that the hidden money (if there really was money there) had passed for-

ever out of our reach, we turned our attention to getting what we could for Pappy and Granny out of their remaining stock.

What galled us now was the big show that young Sweet was putting on as his own plans developed. We had to sell our stuff in a barn, but he had a swell store, with a brand-new plate-glass front, new lights, new fixtures, a new hardwood floor and new everything. He had beautiful new stuff to sell too, while our stuff for the most part was so old that it creaked in its joints.

But the thing that hit me the hardest was when the Sweets brought Miss Lindsley to town to help them. They had a grand opening, with an orchestra and free carnations, inviting the whole countryside to come in and see the very latest in home decorations, as demonstrated by a Chicago expert. I wouldn't go to the grand opening myself, for I didn't want to see Miss Lindsley again, or ever have anything more to do with her. She had let on that she was my friend, leading me with her pleasant ways into making a fool of myself. Yes, I thought I was big that day, riding around with her and asking her (like a big sap!) to wait for me till I grew up. I thought then that she was what she pretended to be. But I knew now that she wasn't. She had proved it in not answering my letter. And here was further proof in her going over completely to the enemy's side.

But Poppy wanted to know what was going on

in the new store, to better make his own plans. So he went over on the opening day, telling me glowingly when he got back about the jostling crowds, the snappy music and the many beautiful home decorating suggestions that the clever Chicago expert had worked out there.

"It's a nifty store all right," he ran on. "There's no doubt about that. The town can justly feel proud of it too. They've got draperies, curtains, rugs, paintings, art objects, wall-paper, paint and everything that you can think of to decorate with. And, boy!—it's plenty high-priced, if you ask me. So we won't give up yet. For everybody can't afford high-priced stuff like that. There isn't a store in the country that can beat us on bargains, and that's what it's going to be around here from now on—bargains and still more bargains. Instead of being ashamed of the old barn, we'll put that in our advertising. 'Buy your wall-paper and paint in the BIG RED BARN on Elm Street and save money,' or, 'Two boys and a BARNFUL OF WALL-PAPER—come and pick out all you want at a penny a roll.' That's the way we'll work it, Jerry. So let young Sweet have his swell store if he wants it. We'll come out all right in the end, and Granny and Pappy too. It'll just take a little work, that's all. But work like that is fun."

I thought I'd find Miss Lindsley at our house that noon. And I kept wondering, as the dinner hour approached, what I'd say to her, or rather how I could keep from saying anything at all to

her, which was more what I wanted. But the Sweets, I learned when I got home, had arranged for her to stay with them.

"I never knew till to-day," says Mother during dinner, "that Truman Sweet was a heavy stockholder in Martha's company. But he is, and quite a power there too. She told me so herself, when she ran in for a few minutes this morning. That's where he got his stock. And that's how he happened to get her down here."

"And is she going to be here right along?" Dad asked, surprised.

"No, just during the grand opening and then on Wednesdays. Mr. Sweet really borrowed her from the Chicago firm. He's trying to make a big show at the store. And I think it's nice too to have someone of her talents to consult with about interior decorations. It's going to be a big thing for the business, I think."

"Humph!" I grunted, stabbing a pickle. For you can imagine how I enjoyed hearing that kind of talk.

"But why didn't Martha stay with us?" Dad asked further.

"She expected to. But she saw right off that Truman Sweet didn't like it. For you know all the friction we've had lately between the two families. So rather than antagonize him, and possibly endanger her position, she accepted his invitation instead, though she told me confidentially that she can't bear him. And William, she says, is a conceited little prig. But she's sup-

posed to teach him everything she knows about color harmony, so that some day he can do the work himself. They've even asked her to give him painting lessons on her trips down here. And now, Jerry, this next'll interest you."

"What?" I looked up quickly.

"I was telling Martha how you had been selling wall-paper in the store ahead of her, to help old Pappy, and she's suggested, to help too, that you pick out about a hundred samples of your oldest and oddest patterns, and put them in her car at Whaley's garage. She's going to try and sell the paper for you when she gets back to Chicago, only you and Poppy mustn't ever let Truman Sweet find out about it."

"I think that's mighty kind of her," says Dad. "And it shows you how much she thinks of you, Jerry. So you want to be sure and carry out her instructions, and not get her into trouble."

"Yes, for goodness' sake don't let this get back to Truman Sweet's ears," admonished Mother. "For you can imagine what he'd do if he ever found out that she was helping the Paisleys."

"But where does she expect to sell the old wall-paper?" Dad asked curiously.

"To antique collectors. For millionaires with antique chairs have got to have wall-paper to match. Genuine old wall-paper, she said, sometimes sells for five and ten dollars a roll."

"Jumpin' Jupiter!" I yipped. "And we've been selling it for a penny a roll."

"Well, don't think," Mother added quickly, "that you can sell all you've got through her for five dollars a roll. For she'll have to find just the right buyer. But she'll tell you all about that herself when she writes. And don't forget, Jerry, that you're to keep this quiet from the Sweets. For she'd probably lose her position if they found out about it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," says I.

And grabbing my cap I lit out excitedly for Poppy's house.

Five dollars a roll! Oh, boy, oh, boy!

CHAPTER XVIII

EXCITING DAYS

RED was getting a free shampoo on Granny's back porch when I got there, having messed himself up with black paint. And on the front of the barn was a new sign:

> This barn is packed full of wall-paper, some of it selling for as little as a penny a roll. Come in and take your pick.
>
> Poppy Ott & Co.,
> Interior Decorators

"But how in the world did you happen to get so much of the paint in your hair?" Granny quizzed Red, as she busily worked on his scalp with her nimble fingers.

"Poppy flipped his brush at me," Red grinned through the suds.

"Well, Poppy ought to get a good shaking up for that."

"But why don't you just clip it off?" squirmed Red. "For I need a hair-cut anyway."

"Clip nothing," Granny retorted. "You set there till I finish."

"Ouch!" squawked Red, as she dug deeper.

"I was a big simpleton ever to let you and Poppy start that sign in the first place. I might have known that you'd end up in a mess like this. For that's usually what happens when two boys get together with a paint pail."

"And where's Poppy now?" I asked Red.

"Out in the barn, I guess."

We had our stock in pretty good shape now, at least we had fixed up the barn the best we could, though it was still a crazy-looking place to call a store, with wall-paper piled in mangers and stalls. But that was the way Poppy wanted it. And when I got there he was hanging hay from the overhead beams to make it look still more barny. He had brought in a couple of pitchforks too, and an old milk pail.

"Say, Jerry," he asked, when I came in, "do you know where we can borrow a cow?"

"For the love of mud!" I squeaked. "You don't mean to tell me that you're going to keep a cow in here too?"

"No, but I'd like to borrow four or five cows to get up a parade. For we're going to have a grand opening ourselves. And as long as we've got to sell our stuff in a barn I thought it would be a slick stunt to get up a parade of cows and horses, with signs on them telling about our bargain wall-paper. We can get up a kid band too, for it's always easy to get kids to play if you buy them a quart of ice cream. Don't you think that's a dandy idea, Jerry?"

OLD SWEET GOT BACK IN HIS STORE IN A HURRY——

Poppy Ott & Co. Inferior Decorators *Page 163*

"It couldn't have been better before dinner," I explained to him. "But it isn't so good now."

"Why not?" he asked quickly.

I told him about the five-dollar wall-paper.

"And you've got to change that sign of yours out in front too," I told him. "For we aren't going to sell any more old wall-paper at a penny a roll when we can get five dollars for it."

He did some quick figuring with a pencil, then sat down limply.

"Oh, oh!" he groaned, holding his head. "Do you know what we lost on that sale, Jerry?"

"I bet it was plenty," says I, with a sick feeling.

"Only about two thousand dollars! For almost everything we sold after the first day was old stuff, the buyers expecting to find hidden money in it."

"Well, let's not tell Granny about it," I spoke hastily.

"We thought we were pretty smart to get a penny a roll for the old paper. But wealthy antique collectors *would* pay a big price for genuine old paper like that. Pappy should have known about it too, and told us. For he couldn't expect us to know about it."

"Well, let's keep the whole thing to ourselves," says I anxiously. "For I don't trust Granny's tongue. And it would be just too bad for Miss Lindsley if word of our scheme ever reached Sweet's ears."

"I tell you what we'll do," Poppy planned

quickly. "We'll get old Pappy out here right away to pick out the samples for us. Then we'll put all that stuff away and hold it to see what Miss Lindsley can do with it."

"And how about the other stuff?" says I.

"Well, I think we might just as well go ahead and sell it for a few cents a roll as we planned. For certainly Miss Lindsley won't want any of that."

"And we'll have the parade and grand opening just the same, huh?" I grinned.

"Why not?" he grinned back.

"Boy!" I cried, kicking up my heels. "This is going to be fun."

And it *was* fun too! I'll never forget that crazy parade as long as I live. We had five sleepy old cows with cowbells on, a mule, a sway-backed plow horse and a rooster in a cage, all decorated with old wall-paper and signs. We borrowed the animals from one of Dad's friends in the country, who went along in the parade to see that they behaved. With our kid band tooting in front, the cowbells jingling, the old mule hee-hawing and the rooster crowing, we sure got attention. The people almost laughed themselves sick. We had expected the little kids to follow us as we went up one street and down another, but half the town's grown-ups followed us too, to get a longer laugh.

But the funniest of all happened on Canal Street, where old Sweet, thinking that the parade was just a take-off on his own grand opening,

boiled out with a club to drive us off, cows and all. But he got back in his store in a hurry, let me tell you, when the old mule took after him. If the owner of the mule hadn't been there to stop it, I honestly believe it would have gone right through the new plate-glass front. And how the people roared who saw it!

Back at the barn we had a concert, just like Sweet's, but we didn't get the crowd that he did, nor did we expect it. For after all the parade was pretty much monkey-work. We just did it to let the people know that we were still in business and excite their curiosity, expecting them to come around afterwards, which a lot of them did. Every day we sold a little something, some days more than others. Then one day we got an order from Miss Lindsley for twenty-six rolls of the Abe Lincoln paper, and accompanying the order was a check for one hundred and fifteen dollars!

"How much did you say?" asked Poppy, dazed, when I read the check to him.

"A hundred and fifteen dollars," I repeated.

"Let me see it," he reached eagerly.

"Well, there it is—look for yourself."

"Now, ain't that somethin'!" says he, holding the check off and admiring it. "Oh, boy, oh, boy! The Sweets themselves couldn't do that good."

"I'm quite sure," Miss Lindsley wrote, "that I'll have another order for you in a few days. So don't let any of the old paper get away from you. Of course, I'm trying to get a top-notch

price for you. But the people I'm dealing with can well afford to pay what I'm asking. They're buying something that they can't get elsewhere at any price. And remember!—no one ever learned any incriminating secrets from a clam!"

We got the paper off on the sly, sending it to Miss Lindsley's home address. And having cashed the check, we hid the money in Poppy's attic. It would be Pappy's in the end. But we didn't dare tell the old man about it then.

He and Granny had tried hard to keep up a cheerful front after their bitter disappointment in the store. But we could see new troubled lines forming in their kindly faces daily. And oh, how tickled we were as the big orders kept coming in! For the money would mean so much to the old couple later on.

Doc Leland waddled in one day.

"I thought maybe I'd find them cows in here that you boys had in the parade," he chuckled, looking around curiously.

"No," grinned Poppy, "we had to take the cows back, and the mule too. For they belonged to a farmer."

"I swan!" Doc shook with laughter. "That's the funniest thing I ever saw, 'specially when the mule took after Truman. I busted two buttons off my vest laughin' at it. We were all sorry that Truman didn't trip on the curb and give the mule a better chance. How'd you boys ever think up a parade like that anyway?"

"Oh, we have our bright moments," says Poppy. "And did you come in to pick out that new wall-paper for your office?"

"Yes, let's see what you've got."

"Well, here's that King Midas pattern we told you about," says Poppy, bringing it out. "How does that strike you?"

"Humph! Plenty yaller, all right. A little too much so for me."

"Well, how's this one then?"

"Yes, that's better. I like that."

"I think myself it'll make a pretty nifty office for you. And it isn't going to set you back a young fortune either."

"How much?"

"Five cents a roll."

"That's almost too cheap."

"It used to sell for twenty cents a roll."

"And who's goin' to put it on for me?" asked Doc.

"Poppy Ott & Co.," Poppy grinned.

"Humph!" grunted Doc. "I hope that don't mean you yourself."

"I'll get Pappy to help me," says Poppy. "So don't you worry. You'll get a good job all right."

But old Pappy didn't warm up to the idea when approached.

"I'm too old, Poppy, to hang wall-paper."

"But you know how to do it, don't you?"

"Yes, I kin do it," the old man nodded un-

willingly. "But I don't want to, fur I'm 'fraid of fallin'. I don't want to git my collar-bone broke at my age."

"Well, you come along and tell me what to do," says Poppy, assuming all responsibility, "and I'll do the climbing."

So they started out one morning with the paper and a pail of paste. And they had a high old time, I guess. For when Poppy got back he had gobs of wall-paper sticking out all over him. He got the most of it, he told me laughingly, when the ceiling he was putting up fell down on top of him. He told about a cat of Doc's too that got so much paper stuck on it that all it could do was roll around and yowl. But Doc was patient through it all, knowing that Poppy was doing his best. And having gotten the knack of it finally, and completing the job satisfactorily, Poppy started out to get more such papering jobs, leaving me to run the store.

It was on that first papering job, at Doc's office, that Poppy got the name "Inferior Decorators" hitched to him. He had taken his stuff over there in a two-wheeled push-cart on which he had painted, Poppy Ott & Co., Interior Decorators. Doc noticed the cart. And a great joker himself, he changed the "t" in Interior to "f," which made the sign read, Poppy Ott & Co., Inferior Decorators. Later some wag made the same change in the barn sign, with the whole town laughing about it, and realizing that he'd

have to bear the name anyway, Poppy just let it stand.

So it was POPPY OTT & CO., INFERIOR DECORATORS, from then on.

The Sweets didn't like it when they heard that Poppy was soliciting the town for papering jobs. So dear little William, the pride of the family, started out himself with some of his finest samples and superior airs. From then on it was a race between the two boys to see who could get the most business. But nobody's gab could beat Poppy's, once he got wound up. He had bargain stuff too, and was putting it on at bargain rates. So wherever price was the deciding factor he got the business, turning everything he made over to old Granny, who put the money away as fast as she got it, all thought gone from her head now of a new ice box or anything else new of an expensive character. Instead of spending, she was trying miserly to get together as much as she could for her own and Pappy's final years.

And so the days passed busily and excitedly, with the attic pile growing and Poppy papering his head off wherever he could wedge himself in. Sweet too got several nice jobs, with the help of Miss Lindsley, who kept coming to town regularly as arranged, but who of course never came near us.

Then one morning I got a letter from her, saying she had been discharged. Someone in the Tutter bank had told Sweet about the big checks

that she had been sending us, and when questioned about the matter in Chicago she had freely admitted that she was selling wall-paper for us on the side, the dismissal following.

"I'm really glad it happened," she wrote lightheartedly, "for I've been needing a vacation for years, and can do some of that landscape painting now that I told you about. And what a relief to get away from those unbearable Sweets! I'm going down to Cincinnati for a short visit, and feel quite sure I can send you a nice order or two from there, as I know several very wealthy antique collectors there. And when next I show up in Tutter, with my palette and easel, instead of having to suffer the companionship of the most unbearable boy in the world, I'll be staying happily with one of the finest. Can you guess who I mean, Jerry? If you can't, look in the mirror."

"Truman Sweet ought to have his neck cracked," growled Poppy, when I showed him the letter, in the barn. "For he's the most heartless old cheat that I ever heard tell of in all my life. What is it to him if Miss Lindsley sells some of the old wall-paper for us on the side? It's nothing out of his pocket."

"He's after the property here for the back rent," says I. "And of course the less we sell the better chance he'll have to get it. That's why he didn't want Miss Lindsley helping us."

"But he hasn't stopped her any by firing her."

"No, but he hindered us all he could, and satisfied his spite too."

"We've got enough hidden money now to pay the back rent. So the property's safe. But it galls me to have to turn the money over to him. For I figure that the back rent was Martin Sweet's final gift to old Pappy. And I don't think Truman Sweet's got any real right to it at all."

"And shall we tell Pappy now about the hidden money?" I asked. "For it doesn't have to be a secret any more."

"No," says Poppy, "let's see how much we can pile up and then tell him. For it'll be more fun to surprise him."

CHAPTER XIX

THE OLD COUNTESS

WHILE Poppy and I were talking together in the barn a big black auto drew up in front. And when I say big I mean big. Boy!—that was the whoppingest, shinest, classiest car that I ever had seen in all my life. There was a liveried chauffeur at the wheel and beside him, in the open front seat, a liveried footman, who got down with wooden dignity to open a crested door for a wizened, leather-faced, richly-dressed old lady, wearing a bobby little bonnet over what was unmistakably a green twisted wig. She couldn't have been a day under ninety, yet she got out with the spring and bounce of a young girl, with bright eyes to match, motioning to the wooden-faced footman, as he bowed her out, to follow her into the house with a caged parrot.

The jostling set the parrot to singing like a weaving drunken sailor.

"Fifteen men on the Dead Man's chest,
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum-m!"

"Well, Jason," the woman turned sharply,

hitching at her wig, "what are you waiting for? Shake 'er up for that."

"Very good, Your Highness," replied the footman respectfully, with still not the least expression in his face. And turning the swaying parrot upside-down in its cage, he shook it briskly.

"Thunderation!" exploded the ruffled bird, when righted. "Who blew up the ship?"

And off it went again into its crazy weaving song.

"Fifteen men on the Dead Man's chest,
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum-m!"

"Some more, Jason," the woman commanded.

"Very good, Your Highness," the footman complied.

"Avast! Avast!" pleaded the parrot finally. And when righted again it began whimpering like a spanked baby. "Minerva's sorry! Poor Minerva! Nice Minerva!"

"That's better," says the woman, with her bonnet bobbing sharply. "And I want you to behave yourself here too, for you're going to live here with a nice old man and his wife. They're old friends of mine, and I brought you all the way from England for them. And if I ever hear of you using any of that rough sea talk of yours, I'll bring Jason back here and shake you out of your tail feathers. Are you listening to me, Minerva?"

"Pretty Countess!" the parrot continued its baby talk, begging in its cage. "Nice Minerva!"

"Very well, Jason," commanded the woman, going on stiffly to the house. "You can bring 'er in now."

And they all went in the front door.

Granny was in the garden picking peas for dinner.

"You've got company in the house," I ran and told her excitedly.

"Who?" she straightened, her apron full.

"That Countess from England. She just came in a big car. And she has a parrot for you."

The peas streamed unnoticed through the garden as Granny ran excitedly to the house, meeting her visitor, in a warm sisterly embrace, in the back door.

Picking up the scattered peas in my cap, I took them into the kitchen, where the Countess, having discovered an ovenful of home-made bread there, was slicing herself a heel, with the footman standing at attention like a wooden Indian, the parrot held out in front of him.

"There's nothing I like better than a warm crust," says the funny old lady, getting herself set comfortably at the kitchen table.

Granny was embarrassed, as she showed, to have such a distinguished visitor eating in the kitchen, and tried to persuade her to move into the adjoining dining room. But the Countess wouldn't budge.

"Fiddlesticks!" she snorted. "Don't you suppose I ever ate in a kitchen before? I often eat with the cook at home, so I can tell him then and

there what I like or don't like about his cooking. For if you want to throw a chop in a cook's face, why walk the whole length of the house to do it? Besides, it's a pleasure to eat in such a cozy kitchen as yours, with the smell of that new bread! You always were a wonderful bread baker, Carrie—if you'll just get me some butter now."

"I'm afraid my butter isn't very hard," Granny apologized for it, bringing it. "For we haven't taken ice much this summer."

"Ice?" says the Countess, turning and staring at the old ice box with a surprised air. "You don't mean to tell me that you still use one of those outlandish things? Jason!" the last was snapped commandingly.

"Yes, Your Highness?"

"Put Minerva down and throw that rattletrap out the back door."

"The ice chest, Your Highness?" the footman spoke without the slightest trace of surprise over the extraordinary command.

"Yes—the ice chest, of course. What did you think I meant? You've got ears, haven't you? Or are they made of wood like your head? And get it out of here in a hurry."

"Very well, Your Highness," the footman moved agilely to obey.

I was waiting for Granny to get me a pan for the peas. But peas were the farthest from her thoughts now.

"Oh, no—please!" she begged, anguished, as

she saw her old ice box skidding across the kitchen floor on its rusted rollers. "Please don't throw it out. For it's all I have—I can't afford a better one."

"Keep going with it, Jason," the Countess instructed, spreading busily with the butter knife. "And when you get it outside, drive down town and get an electric one, and charge it to me. You can measure over there to see how much space there is, and get one to fit it. See that you get a good one too. And, Jason!"

"Yes, Your Highness?" the footman paused, with the ice box halfway through the door.

"Give this crust to Minerva. For it's good for 'er."

"I'll bash the first seadog on the beagle who offers me a crummy old crust," rolled the parrot, swaying in its cage.

Granny gasped. "Mercy me!—I never heard a bird talk that way before."

"Well, you'll probably hear worse than that from 'er before you're through with 'er," the Countess spoke dryly. "For I bought 'er from an old tar. But she'll stop in a hurry if you pour cold water on 'er. That's the way I take the ginger out of 'er."

"And you say you're going to leave her here?" gasped Granny, plainly not enthused over the gift.

"Yes, I brought 'er over purposely for Sam. For he told me one time how he'd always wanted a parrot. But where is he, Carrie?"

"He went down town to see a lawyer."

"A lawyer! Good heavens! You don't mean to tell me that you're getting a divorce, at your age?"

"Oh, no!" says Granny quickly, flushing. "It's about some back rent—that we owe."

The footman was having difficulties with Minerva.

"If you please, Your Highness," he ventured humbly.

"If I please what?" snapped the Countess.

"It's Minerva, Your Highness. She's exhibiting a very contrary attitude toward the crust."

"Well, shake 'er up—for that's the only way to handle 'er when she gets notional. You ought to know that as well as me by this time."

Granny's eyes almost popped out of her head at what followed.

"Goodness me!" she cried, startled. "Aren't you afraid you'll kill the poor bird, shaking it that way?"

"Well, you can humor 'er if you want to," munched the Countess, undisturbed by the parrot's fuming futile squawks. "But I've always said I'd never have a parrot run over *me*. That's my way of handling 'er. But you can do as you please when I'm gone. I warn you though—she's worse than that camel that stuck its head in a tent. If you give 'er an inch she'll take a mile. And don't ever let 'er run loose either, or she'll steal you blind. For she hides everything she can carry."

Subdued again, the parrot munched the crust, mumbling morbidly to itself, with foreboding eyes, while Jason, after getting the ice box out, went off as instructed to get the new one.

Granny finally got a pan and relieved me of the peas.

"Thanks, Jerry," says she, putting them away nervously.

"Is this boy some relative of yours?" the Countess asked, looking me over sharply.

"No, just a neighbor boy. You probably remember his father—Gerald Todd?"

"The brickyard man?"

"Yes. Jerry is one of our nicest and most helpful boys."

"Well, he'd look better to me if he combed his hair. What's the matter?" the visitor asked me sharply, scowling. "Can't your father afford to buy you a pocket comb? Well, here's a quarter. See that you don't spend it all for candy either. For I like to see boys with their hair combed. . . . And when do you expect Sam, Carrie? For I've got an important job for him this afternoon."

"He ought to be along any minute now."

"I didn't know till I stopped at the store that he was out of there."

"We've had a lot of difficulties at the store," Granny admitted, trying not to show her troubles any more than she could help. "And finally we had to give it up altogether. Jonathan Sweet's son and grandson are running it now."

"And isn't Sam doing any draping either?" the Countess asked quickly.

"He would if he could get it to do. He's had very few calls though the past few years. But when did you get here, Countess?"

"Yesterday afternoon. And the minute I saw those drapes I knew Sam hadn't hung 'em. So I went around with a rake and yanked 'em all down. For I know what I want! I specifically told that Chicago company to get Sam Paisley to do the drapes. But they evidently thought they could do as they pleased and I wouldn't be the wiser."

"Nothing was said to Sam about the drapes."

"So I suspected. And I wish now I'd turned the whole job over to him."

"Yes, I wish you had," I put in.

The phone rang then. And when Granny went off to answer it, in the next room, the Countess beckoned me over quickly.

"What happened?" she asked, in a low voice. "Did Sam lose the store?"

"Yes. He got put out for not paying his rent."

"You mean he wouldn't, or couldn't?"

"He couldn't. He's just about broke."

"But how in the world did he get himself in such reduced straits as that? For he had a fine-paying store here when I left. He was at the peak of his craft too. Whatever happened to him to give him such a set-back?"

"Well, he got too old to travel, or got so he

didn't want to travel, depending entirely on the store. And toward the last his stock was so old and out of date that he just couldn't sell enough to pay the rent, let alone make a living besides."

"And hasn't he any stocks or bonds to help out now?"

"No. All he's got left is the home here and the old wall-paper from his store."

"Humph! That explains Carrie's worried look. I wondered at it."

"The store's been a worry to her for a long time. And just recently she had a big disappointment too."

"How was that?"

I told about the hidden money, and the hopes it had built up and finally the bitter disappointment.

"And you say she was planning to buy an electric refrigerator when she found the money?"

"Yes."

"Anything else?"

"Some inner-spring mattresses and an electric sewing machine."

"And what else?"

"A fireplace."

"Well, I can't buy a fireplace and move it in here, like I can a refrigerator, but I'll send a man over to see about it. And was there anything else?"

"That's all she mentioned."

"And where did you say the wall-paper is now?"

"Out in the barn. Another boy and I are trying to sell it."

"Well, I'm going to see if I can't find a little store for Sam, and set him up in the draping business. For there's no reason why he can't earn a living that way—with his skill."

"That's what he should have stuck to," says I.

"Why, of course. I'm surprised that Carrie let him drop it—just to sell wall-paper and paint."

A door opened and closed in the front part of the house.

"Is that you, Pappy?" Granny called, hanging up the receiver.

"Yes, ma," came the slow dejected reply, as the old man came into the adjoining room. "Did the lawyer call you up?"

"Yes, I just got through talking with him. He says we've got to appear in court this afternoon."

"Truman Sweet was there, ma," the old man recited in a discouraged beaten voice. "An' I tried my best to git him to take the three hundred dollars we've got saved up, an' let us off. But he says he's got to have the whole six hundred we owe him, or he'll go ahead with the lawsuit."

"And wouldn't he take my old sofa for the balance?"

"I—I didn't mention it to him."

"But I told you to."

"I know how you love it. I don't think it's right, ma, that you should have to give it up."

"But it's better for us to do that than to lose our home."

The Countess got up quietly to leave.

"I'll go down town and fix that up in a hurry," she told me, in a low voice. "For I want Sam to hang my drapes this afternoon, and certainly he can't lawsuit and drape too. Tell him I'll send the car for him at one o'clock."

"But aren't you going to wait for the car yourself?" I asked her, as she tiptoed to the back door and opened it quietly.

"Fiddlesticks! I had legs long before I had rubber-tired wheels."

And off she went, with the ginger of a ten-year-old, her bonnet bobbing and the tails of her crazy green wig trailing behind her.

CHAPTER XX

GRANNY'S "GHOST"

PAPPY caught sight of the moping parrot in the kitchen.

"Why, ma!" he pottered out, his shaggy eyebrows arched with surprise. "Where did you git the purty parrot?"

Granny flew after him, her kindly face flooding with dismay when she found her visitor gone, the first thought being that she had offended an old friend by leaving her alone so long.

But I quickly straightened that out. The Countess hadn't left offended, I said, but had hurried off, like the helpful old soul that she was, to head off the impending lawsuit, wanting Pappy to come over to the Towers instead to put up her drapes.

Vastly relieved, Granny called to the old man, near the parrot.

"Did you hear that, Pappy? The Countess is sending her car for you at one o'clock. She wants you to hang her drapes this afternoon."

"But I thought her drapes were already up?" Pappy looked up from the parrot, surprised. "I

thought that Chicago company put 'em up fur her."

Granny told then how the drapes had been torn down, and why.

"But you mustn't take anything for rehanging them, Pappy," the old lady counseled earnestly. "For she's going to buy us an electric refrigerator, which will come to a lot more than your work. So don't accept a penny from her, but tell her instead that your work is our little gift to her. For we can't expect her to do all the giving, just because she has the most. We should give too, as we can."

Told further that the parrot was his, and that it had been brought all the way from England for him, the beaming old man bent over it lovingly.

"Nice Polly," says he.

"Her name's Minerva," Granny approached gingerly, plainly fearful herself of the remarkable bird. "But you better be careful how you put your face down that way, Pappy, or the first thing you know she'll fasten her beak on the end of your nose."

But Pappy wouldn't believe for an instant that his treasured gift could be capable of any such wickedness as that.

"Her?" he cackled skeptically. "A sweet innocent little thing like her? Why, she wouldn't hurt a fly. She's jest settin' there, in them purty green feathers of hers, with her purty red tail hangin' down, tellin' herself what a nice ol' man

I be, an' what good friends we're goin' to be."

"Well, she didn't sound very sweet and innocent to me a minute ago," Granny still kept off herself, nervous. "Goodness me! She took on like a blood-thirsty old pirate. I'm scared to death of her myself."

"An' what'd you say her name is, ma? Tell me ag'in."

"Minerva."

"Well, she can't be so turribly bad with a nice name like that. Fur that means wisdom an' sagacity. But let me have a cracker, so I kin start makin' friends with her. Fur did you see her wink at me then, with them pinched little eyes of hers?—the funny little rascal!"

"It looked more like a warning blink to me."

And that's what it was too, as the bird's later actions proved. Though meek outwardly, it seethed within over the bread-crust humiliation, longing for revenge, and saw in guileless old Pappy the means of obtaining it.

"Nice Minerva," says he, putting the cracker trustfully through the cage bars.

The crafty bird had its eyes fastened on his fingers, but they weren't quite close enough yet!

"Nice Minerva," says he again, pushing the cracker in as far as he could and holding it there temptingly.

The scheming bird brought its head around slowly, as though to take the offered cracker, but slashed lightning-like at the extended fingers instead with its murderous bill, laughing hideously

as Pappy fell back, dumfounded, with bleeding fingers.

"There!—didn't I tell you!" cried Granny. "Didn't I tell you what she'd do to you, if you got too close to her?"

"I—I guess I was too hasty with 'er," Pappy generously excused the vicious attack. "I guess she don't want to make friends with me quite so quick."

"I knew what she was waitin' for—the wicked old thing! For I'd seen her flare up before. And you can be thankful, Pappy, that it wasn't your nose instead."

"Yes," the old man tremblingly felt of his nose with his good hand, while Granny worked on the other, "I'm glad it wasn't my nose, ma."

Called to the phone again, Granny happily told Pappy upon her return that the lawsuit had been dropped for good. Nor was that the end of the good things around there that memorable morning. Close on the heels of the favorable phone call came the new refrigerator, with the sewing machine and mattresses following, and finally a call from the fireplace builder.

Granny was almost beside herself with joy.

"All the things I've been wanting!" says she, standing among them happily. "Oh, what a wonderful friend the Countess is! But she must have been a mind reader to buy me the sewing machine and mattresses too. It's just like wishing, with a magic wishing ring, and having my wishes all come true."

"Yes," Pappy cackled dryly, as he gingerly crooked his bandaged fingers, "you got the sewin' machine an' I got the talkin' machine—or maybe I should call it the meat slicer."

"I feel guilty in letting her buy us so much," Granny ran on. "Yet I'm glad she did it, for it's nice to have things like other people. It wasn't as though we had hinted to her either—she bought everything of her own accord. Oh, it must be wonderful to have her riches and a heart to match! No wonder she holds her age so well. It's happiness in doing for others that keeps her so young."

Following that first trip to the Towers, Pappy went over daily for more than two weeks, coming home dead tired at first, but soon getting into the swing of it again. He showed that he liked it too. There was a new confident sparkle in his eyes. He even stepped it off livelier.

I had a hunch, from things he told at night when he came in, that the Countess was just manufacturing work for him to help him out. For I couldn't conceive that she really was as finical about her drapes as he reported. Some of them he did over four and five times, not because his own work was unsatisfactory, but because she kept changing her mind about the colors. That meant cutting into brand new materials, sewing, and all kinds of fine work in his line. Granny did some of the sewing for him and I saw then that making and hanging drapes of this quality really was an art.

The Countess and her liveried servants were a familiar sight in Tutter now, for hardly a day passed that the generous old lady didn't show up somewhere in town to bring happiness to somebody. The town buzzed with the stories of her extravagant gifts. So it isn't surprising that there was a front-window rush whenever she came into a neighborhood calling, for that meant a new front porch or a new something-or-other for somebody.

People followed her into the stores wherever she went to see what she'd buy next. But she soon made it clear that she wasn't buying stuff for everybody. Her old friends benefited handsomely, and in all cases of real need she spent generously, in her own circle and out. But those who greedily hinted to her for things, thinking that they could work her, were put in their place in a jiffy. And what a laugh went around when some of the high-mucky-muck society ladies tried to entertain her! They thought that would be something big—to entertain a real Countess. Earlier some of her old friends had gotten up a little party for her, the story getting out that she had hilariously hung her wig on the parlor chandelier and danced a jig. But when the aspiring society ladies tried to get her out to their party, so that they could get their names in the newspaper, she sent word that she had to stay home that night to doctor a sick cat.

I got to know her real well myself, for almost every day she came around to buy some wall-

paper from me. One afternoon she bought so much that she had to ride in the front seat with the servants. I asked Pappy that night what she was doing with all the paper. But he didn't know—he never had seen any of it over there, he said. So it's my opinion that she and the servants dumped the paper in the river on the way home. Which sounds like waste. But it was her money that paid for it, and if she wanted to take that way of helping two old friends it was nobody's business but her own.

It was during Pappy's second week at the Towers that Granny got her "ghost" scare, which began with the finding of a wadded twenty-dollar bill under the bathroom rug.

The old lady was cleaning up after the fireplace builder, who had kept her usually neat house in a mess during the time he was working there, as everything that he used in the construction of the new fireplace, bricks mortar and everything else, had been carried in through the kitchen in buckets. And it was during this cleaning-up process that the wadded bill came to light.

Granny thought that Pappy had hidden the bill there, and hopped him about it when he got home that night.

"I might have swept it out without noticing it," she told him nervously. "You shouldn't be so careless with your money, Pappy."

"Swept what out?" the old man stared, at sea. "What are you talkin' about?"

"Why, the twenty-dollar bill that you hid under the bathroom rug."

"I never hid any twenty-dollar bill under the bathroom rug," the old man denied. "Fur where'd I git a twenty-dollar bill? If you found one there, you must 'a' put it there yourself, fur you've bin handlin' all the money lately."

Granny then turned to me, as I sat feeding Minerva peanuts, having come over to get Poppy to go to the picture show with me.

"Jerry," she asked accusingly, "are you the guilty party?"

"Why, of course not," I told her, surprised that she would even suspect me of such a thing. For what object would I have in hiding a big bill like that under her bathroom rug?

The following morning she met me with saucer-like eyes, having found another similar bill under a pie plate in the cupboard.

"Do you suppose it's a ghost?" she asked me, awed.

"But what makes you think it's a ghost?" says I, startled by the suggestion.

"It's either that," says she, with conviction, "or Pappy or I are walking in our sleep."

"It looks to me," says I anxiously, "as though you'd better get your money in the bank, before you hide it some place where you'll never find it."

"That's what I'm going to do," says she, "as soon as the bank opens."

Which I thought would end the matter there,

for I had heard before of sleep walkers hiding stuff that way without any knowledge of it afterwards. But to my unbounded amazement Granny got me out of bed the following morning to tell me, on the phone, that there *was* a ghost in the house.

I got my breakfast and got over there just as quickly as I could.

"It's old Jonathan Sweet's ghost," she told me, in a quavering voice, her eyes roving around as though she expected any second to have something reach out of the air and grab her. "I heard him come down the attic stairs last night just as the clock struck midnight. I heard the coffee pot rattle too. And when I got the pot out this morning, to get breakfast, there was another twenty-dollar bill in it."

"And you're sure it wasn't Pappy that you heard?" says I, dumfounded by the riddle.

"No, he was in bed."

"But I never believed in ghosts," I held off sensibly.

"I never did either till now. But it can't be anything else, Jerry."

"But what makes you so sure it's old Jonathan's ghost?" I asked.

"Well, he tried to help us before and failed, and I think now he's helping us this way."

CHAPTER XXI

THE ATTIC'S SECRET

THE old Countess came in while we were talking.

"What's this I hear about you finding twenty-dollar bills?" she asked Granny.

"Did Pappy tell you?"

"Yes."

"I think it's old Jonathan Sweet's ghost," says Granny, her eyes still dilated.

"Ghost fiddlesticks! Has Minerva been loose?"

"No," Granny shook her head.

My heart took a sudden bound here. Could it be possible, I asked myself, that the parrot had been loose without Granny knowing about it, and that the bills had come from our cache in the attic?

Up the stairs I went, three steps at a bound, and finding the money gone, just as I had suspected, down I tumbled again and out to get Poppy, who was out papering a house.

"What's the matter, Jerry?" he asked, startled, when I finally ran him down.

"Our money's gone," I gasped.

"What money?" says he.

"In the attic."

"Honest, Jerry?" he cried, his eyes popping.

"The parrot stole it and hid it," I told him.

"Hid it where?"

"All over the house, I guess."

"And was that some of the money that Granny found in the bathroom?"

"Sure thing."

"But how'd you happen to find it was gone?" Poppy asked eagerly. "Did you go up there to put some more with it?"

"No, but Granny found another twenty-dollar bill in her coffee pot this morning, and when the Countess heard about it, through Pappy, she said right off it was the parrot. The queer part is though that Granny doesn't even know when the parrot was loose."

"Well, I think I can explain that," says Poppy quickly. "For when I got Pappy out of bed the other morning I saw the parrot through the window. It was just going into its cage. So I think Pappy has been secretly letting it loose nights to humor it. But wait till I put on this strip of paper, Jerry, and I'll go back with you."

"I don't think that Granny comprehends yet," says I, "where the money came from. For I didn't take much time to talk about it when I found it gone, but lit out just as quickly as I could to get you."

Poppy gave a queer laugh.

"We didn't do so well with our other search," says he, "but this one ought to be fun."

"Yes, but what if we never find it all?" I worried.

"Oh, sure we will," he spoke confidently.

The Countess went at me sharply when Poppy and I tumbled in.

"But how much money did you boys have in that old shoe in the attic?" she asked.

"I don't know," I told her dizzily.

"You don't know?" she snapped, scowling.

"Jerry means he doesn't know exactly," Poppy put in for me.

"Well, how much do you think you had?—can either of you answer that?"

"About six hundred dollars," says Poppy.

I thought the old lady's eyes would fall out of her head.

"Six hundred dollars?" she gasped. "Good heavens! Where did you get it all?"

"Selling wall-paper to antique collectors."

"And you hid the money in an old shoe?"

Poppy nodded weakly.

"Why, it's the most brainless thing I ever heard tell of in all my life. Hiding six hundred dollars in an old shoe! Did you hear that, Carrie?"

Granny was going through the upper part of the cupboard, on a chair.

"Here's another five dollars," she called down, excited.

"Well, don't let those crazy boys get their

hands on it—here, give it to me! And did you hear what they just told me, Carrie?"

"What?" Granny asked, looking down.

"They had six hundred dollars in that old shoe."

Over went Granny in a dead faint, Poppy catching her as she fell. But she was soon up again.

"Did—did you say six hundred dollars?" she gasped weakly.

The Countess motioned Poppy over.

"You seem to have the most brains of the two," she snapped, with a disgusted look at me, "so tell her what you know about it."

Which Poppy did, Granny listening dumfounded.

"And I thought it was old Jonathan's ghost!" she murmured, weak from excitement.

"But what in the world did you keep it a secret for?" the Countess asked Poppy. "If it was Sam's and Carrie's money, why didn't you boys give it to them, instead of hiding it in an old shoe, like a couple of nitwits?"

"We had to keep it a secret at first on account of Miss Lindsley," Poppy further explained.

"It sounds like a fairy story to me," grunted the Countess, still provoked at us. "For I can't picture anyone paying five dollars a roll for old wall-paper, even a soft-brained antique collector. But I suppose it must be so if you boys say it's so."

"Yes, it sounds like a fairy story to me too,"

says Granny, a little stronger now but still dazed. "For I never heard of any such prices either. But let's not scold the boys about it any more, for I think they're deserving of a lot of credit."

"Well, I don't," the Countess snapped, with a cross look at us. "I think myself they both ought to be turned up and warmed up. But if we've got to ransack the house for the money, let's quit chattering about it and get to work, for the sooner we find it the better. And the one who finds the most gets a pail of chocolate drops."

That started a hot search, with Poppy and I chasing to the attic, figuring that the closer we got to the money's original hiding place the more we'd find.

"A twenty for me, Jerry," Poppy cried hilariously, pulling the recovered bill from a knothole.

"And a ten for me," I cried, spotting it in a crack, and grabbing it.

"Another twenty," yipped Poppy, now on his hands and knees under the dusty eaves. "And here's two more!—hot dog!"

"Pig!" I sniffed at him.

"Um-yum-yum!" he smacked tantalizingly. "I always did like chocolate drops."

Granny came flying up.

"How much have you found, Jerry?" she asked.

"Ten," says I shortly.

"Well, you better let me have it," she reached

nervously. "And, Poppy, you better let me have yours too, for I don't want to run the risk of losing it again."

"He's got eighty already," I growled.

"And how much did you and the Countess find?" Poppy poked his cobwebby head out to inquire.

"A hundred and sixty."

"Well, that's almost half of it," says Poppy happily. "So let's keep going now and find the other half."

"Carrie!" the Countess called below. "The phone."

"Coming," Granny flew off.

"And still another twenty," Poppy cried, through the cobwebs.

"You just happened to get the lucky place," I told him.

"And another five! Oh, baby! I can see those chocolate drops getting closer and closer."

In pawing some of the stuff around, in further search, I found a bundle of wall-paper with a tag on it, reading:

> For Sam and Carrie, to be opened after my death.
>
> Jonathan Sweet.

Gee-miny-crickets-gosh! It was the hidden fortune! I knew it the minute I saw it. And did I ever let out a yip!

Poppy came out like a bullet, and down the

stairs we tumbled yelling, the wall-paper trailing behind us and old-time one-dollar bills flying around us like a swarm of bees.

It was the hidden fortune, all right! Truman Sweet, with some vague knowledge of it had started searching for it in old wall-paper in one attic, but thanks to the tricky parrot we had found it in another, when we least expected it.

Granny and Pappy now were rich!

CHAPTER XXII

CONCLUSION

DAD came by at ten-thirty to get me to drive over to Ashton with him, knowing how I liked to go on trips like that with him. But I was too busy to go with him this time, I said, for we had just found the one-dollar bills that old Jonathan Sweet had hidden in the wall-paper for Granny and Pappy, and I was helping Poppy count the bills from one bushel basket into another.

Dad wouldn't believe that we had that much money in the house till I took him in and showed it to him. Then I wish you could have seen his eyes!—they almost popped out of his head.

"How much do you think there is?" he asked, running his hand into the greenbacks.

"Well, if we're right about the ledger dots," says I, "we ought to have around twelve thousand three hundred and sixty-six dollars."

"But you aren't thinking of keeping the money in the house," he spoke anxiously.

"Oh, no," Poppy spoke up quickly. "We're going to take it down to the bank just as soon as we get it counted. And I was wondering,

Mr. Todd, if we couldn't keep it together down there till we got a better chance to go over it. For some of the bills may be worth several times their face value. Take that one that I just put aside—it's almost a hundred years old."

"Well, I'd like to see the banker's face," laughed Dad, "when you boys come in with this basketful of money. A bushel basketful of greenbacks! That's something, if you ask me."

"And what do you think about keeping it together?" says Poppy.

"I think that's a very wise plan," nodded Dad. "In fact you'd be foolish not to do it."

"But how'll they work it at the bank?" says Poppy. "For I never banked money by the basketful before."

"Well," Dad laughed again, "you just tell the banker that you've got a bushel basketful of one-dollar bills that you want to keep in the vault over night for safety. He can arrange it easy enough. Then you can have a regular coin dealer come down from Chicago and look the bills over."

Red whistled in shortly after Dad left.

"Where'd you get all the phoney money?" says he.

"Phoney nothin'," says I. "It's the money we've been looking for for weeks."

"Honest, Jerry?" says he, his eyes swelling.

"Nothing else but," says I.

He grabbed a double handful of the money and threw it in the air.

"I always wanted to stand in a money shower," he grinned, with the greenbacks fluttering all around him.

"Hey, you big egg!—cut that out!" I bellowed, plunging after the scattered money. "What do you think you're throwing anyway?—dirt?"

"That makes me think," says he, turning to Poppy. "You've got a nice job lined up for you, big boy."

"What do you mean?" says Poppy, looking up.

"You know that house you finished painting yesterday, over by Bill Sweet's house?"

"Yes, but what about it?"

"Well, you ought to go over and take a look at it. You better take a paint scraper along too, to scrape the dirt off."

"Dirt?" Poppy stared. "What dirt?"

"Well, you go over and take a look at it, if you want to get a pain in the head. For some time last night someone threw dirt all over it."

"Bill Sweet?" asked Poppy, his mouth hardening.

"Well, what do you think?"

Poppy's eyes blazed now.

"Oh," he clenched his fists, "would I ever like to take that cowardly little sneak down and pound the daylights out of him! For can you imagine anybody being mean enough to do a trick like that?—throwing dirt all over fresh paint! I could pound him into a pulp for it."

"Go ahead," Red egged eagerly. "That'll be fun. And maybe I can get a punch at him myself. I've always wondered if I could put a dent in that mug of his if I got a real good swing at him."

"And is the house as bad as you say?" I asked Red, worried. For Poppy had taken on the job to make a little more money, but would lose instead if he had to scrape the smeared paint all off and paint the house over again.

"Mrs. Lacey was trying to wash the dirt off with her hose, when I came by there a few minutes ago. But the water wouldn't touch it. So you'll have to scrape it off, all right. Young Sweet made sure of that."

Granny had gone into her bedroom for a short rest, with the Countess fanning her. But the two came out presently, and leaving them to continue the count, Poppy and I hurried off with Red to see the damage.

The dirt, we found, was all on Bill Sweet's side, which satisfied us that he was the thrower. We could see where he had scraped it up beside his drive too.

"Well, it might have been worse," says Poppy, looking things over critically. "It makes me fighting mad though. And do you know what I'm going to do, Jerry, when I get this side painted again?"

"What?" I asked quickly.

"I'm going to hide over there in those bushes, and if Sweet comes back for another throw, it'll

be just too bad for him. For the paint's my property till it's dry, and I'm going to protect it with every ounce of strength I've got."

"Well, don't you do it without me," Red spoke eagerly.

"There won't be any ganging," says Poppy, "unless he tries it himself. It'll be just us two. And, boy!—I think I can give him plenty, even if he is a head taller than me."

Poppy and I almost got kicked out of the Commercial Bank that afternoon when we came in with what appeared to be a bushel basketful of potatoes in a coaster wagon.

"Here, here," the cashier importantly flew out of his cage to stop us. "You can't bring those potatoes in here. Turn around now and get them out of here."

"We want to put them in the vault," grinned Poppy.

Mr. Lorring, the president, came out of his private office.

"Why, hello, boys," says he cordially, for he knew us both well. "What are you doing?—selling potatoes?"

We showed him then what was under the potatoes, telling him who the money belonged to and where it had come from, after which the basket was sealed and put in the vault.

The news of the big find swept through town like wildfire, bringing hundreds of congratulating friends to the Paisley home that night. The Countess came over with her whole staff, to take

charge of the hastily procured refreshments, the wonderful old lady herself serving the lemonade from a huge cut-glass punch bowl that she had brought along, beautifully dressed in purple satin, with diamonds all over her. Whenever the bowl got low Jason refilled it, as wooden-faced as ever, the Countess urging everybody to drink plenty. So Red and I drank plenty. In fact we drank so much that we began to gurgle inside, like a well-filled keg. There was cake and ice cream too, and all kinds of other good things. At most parties you just take what they give you on a plate. But here you went around with a plate and took all you could eat. I've forgotten how many times Red and I went around with our plates, but we finally had to stop, bushed.

During the evening Mother and Dad sang a duet, with Red's ma thumping the piano, after which the parrot sang its crazy pirate song, the bird getting the most applause. But that was all right. For don't forget that it was through Minerva that we had accidentally stumbled upon the hidden fortune, for which the bird, however mean it may want to be at times, will always hold the place of honor in Granny's and Pappy's home. Nothing is too good for that parrot now, let me tell you.

Red and I turned paint scraper the day after the party, Poppy following us up with a new coat, the three of us hiding that night as planned. And sure enough, as expected, along came little

sweety-cake to mess things up for us again.

He had been out late with the car, which he put away in the garage and then came tiptoeing with a big paint pail partly filled with old red barn paint. Coming up to within good throwing distance, he braced himself, with a mean chuckle, and gave a heave—Poppy at the same instant grabbing him from behind. Down they went, Poppy punching and Sweet kicking and yelling.

"Pa! Help! Help!"

Poppy got on top, quick as a cat. And, boy! —did he ever give that young smarty a beating.

"Help! Help!" young Sweet squawked again.

His father came running, just as Poppy, after a final pile-driver punch, jammed the paint pail over the other kid's head.

"You brought it here," panted Poppy, "so take it home with you again."

Old Sweet pulled the pail off, then turned on Poppy like a murderous tiger.

"You'll land in jail for this, you brutal little rowdy! I warned you! And now you're going to be put where you belong."

The town marshal then stepped into sight, Poppy having had a talk with him earlier.

"What's the matter, Truman?" the marshal drawled pleasantly.

"Arrest that boy!" bellowed old Sweet, jabbing his painty hand at Poppy.

"Arrest him?—what for?" the marshal grunted.

"For picking on my son and maltreating him.

You can see yourself what's been done here. So do your duty, officer."

"You want me to do my duty, eh?" the marshal growled. "All right then, William, that bein' the case you jest come along with me."

"Pa!" squawked young Sweet, pulling back. "Don't let him take me! Pa! Save me!"

"You fool!" old Sweet bellowed at the marshal. "You're taking the wrong boy."

"Oh, no, I'm not!" growled the officer. "I know who's at fault here, for I saw it all. Look at that house over there! That's your son's work. The Ott boy was simply defending his rights."

"William!" old Sweet gasped. "Did you do that?"

"No, I didn't, pa," came the whining denial. "They're lying! I didn't do a thing. I was just going in the house, and that Ott kid grabbed me and threw paint all over me."

"Do you hear that?" old Sweet turned to the marshal. "William says he didn't do it."

"Well, he did do it," the marshal had his jaw set determinedly now, "for I saw him myself. He's going to jail for it too. For we've played favorites in this town too long."

"No, no!" old Sweet began to beg. "Please don't lock him up. I'll settle for it—I'll pay anything you ask. Only please don't lock him up and disgrace him."

The marshal turned to Poppy.

"Do you want to settle the matter here?"

"I'm willing," says Poppy generously.

"Yes, yes," old Sweet urged eagerly, "let's settle the matter right now."

"And are you willing to settle it my way?" Poppy asked grimly.

"Yes, yes, of course. Just name your terms. Anything to keep my boy out of jail."

"Yes," Poppy spoke bitterly, "you're willing to do anything in your power to keep your own son out of jail, but if it was me going to jail you'd gloat over it. However, that doesn't worry me. Here's the way I'll settle it: I want thirty dollars in cash right now, to pay me for the ruined paint and my work, and to-morrow Bill's got to scrape all that red paint off and paint the house over again satisfactorily."

"I'll get a painter the first thing in the morning," old Sweet promised.

"Oh, no, you won't!" Poppy stopped that right there. "I said Bill's got to do it himself. Otherwise he can go to jail—just take your choice."

"All right, all right! Do you hear that, William? To-morrow you've got to scrape that red paint off and paint the house over again."

"I won't either," young Sweet rebelled. "I won't paint his old house, and be laughed at."

But he did finally, his father seeing to that, from which moment the fortunes of the Sweet family took a disastrous drop. Until then Truman Sweet had been a power in the town, ruthless and indifferent to others' rights. But to-day

he has only the shabby little farm that he inherited from his brother. The first blow fell when the Chicago decorating company in which he had such big holdings, and which was generally thought to be so sound, went to the wall. He not only lost everything he had in the company, but as one of its directors, and thus liable in part for its debts, he had to dig into his own pockets so deep that finally everything he owned in Tutter went, the new store included, which old Pappy bought for a song. So it wasn't necessary after all for the generous old Countess to set the old man up in business, though she did pay him handsomely for his work at the Towers, in spite of Granny's almost painted protests.

I learned from Miss Lindsley later that she never had received my letter about old Pappy. Nor did she know that the Countess had cabled any special orders about her drapes. So it's always been my opinion that my letter fell into the tricky hands of someone higher up in the company, who saw to it that Miss Lindsley never got it.

Poppy is back in the little cottage on the west side of the street, Mr. Ott having bought and improved it, and the rooms that the two occupied for such a short time in the Paisley house are now used by Miss Lindsley, old Pappy's partner. Yes, the two run the business together, a splendid arrangement, I think, for she has youth and new ideas while he has the splendid gift that

took him so far years ago, and which is standing him in such good stead to-day.

Miss Lindsley could have lived with us if she had wanted to, and did stay with us for a time, but decided, when her plans were completed, to set up a little home of her own. She often reminds me laughingly of our engagement! And every Sunday she's out somewhere painting.

Shortly after the money was found, an antique dealer from Chicago, hearing about our old paper, came down and took it all over, which brought Granny and Pappy another eight hundred dollars. As Granny said, it seemed as though everything was turning into money for them now.

Mr. Lorring had told us that he'd look over the bills himself, having made a study of old currency, later reporting that he had found three bills cataloged at fifteen dollars each, eleven cataloged at three dollars each and thirty-two the catalog value of which ran around two dollars each. Old Pappy later handled the sale of the bills himself, so I don't know exactly what they brought, but I think it was around a hundred and thirty dollars.

We'll never know exactly how much money the parrot hid, for five- and ten-dollar bills are still turning up over there from time to time. Just the other day Granny found one under her kitchen clock. But that's a small matter. Everything included, Pappy banked over $14,000.00,

out of which he paid for the store and stock, still having over $8,000.00 in the bank.

In a letter, put with the hidden money, old Jonathan Sweet explained how it had accumulated over a period of fourteen years, and why he had taken it. "Sam doesn't need the money now," the letter read in part, "but undoubtedly will in his later years, so I am putting it away for him to find then. I thought first of depositing the money to his account in a Chicago bank, but have decided instead to hide it in his attic in some old wall-paper. And let there be no dispute over the money when it is found, as it is all Sam's, taken from his share of the store's profits."

It embarrassed Granny no end when it came out that the wall-paper with the money in it had been in her attic for fourteen years without her even noticing it. She took it as a reflection on her housekeeping. And I'll have to admit that that day it was fearfully dusty and cobwebby up there. She had gotten kind of careless about her attic, I guess, in her old age—though it's surprising at that that she hadn't noticed the bundle long before I dug it out. However, it was found at last, as the dead partner had intended, and everything has turned out all right.

Strict in his accounting, Jonathan Sweet felt that he ought to leave a record somehow of the money taken daily, so used the ledger dots, each representing a dollar bill, as I had suspected. Truman Sweet had found mention of the hidden

fortune in some of his father's papers, which explains why the search began in the attic of the old family home. Never at any time though did Truman Sweet, as he tried desperately to find the money in other likely places, suspect that it was hidden in the Paisley attic.

Poppy and I are looking forward to a trip to New York City, the old Countess having promised to take us with her when she drives east at Christmas. And Granny has been whispering around that when we get ready to go she's going to give each of us a hundred dollars to spend.

When the trip was first mentioned, I thought the Countess was planning to take us as far as New York in her car, on her way to England, and then send us back on the train. But it's her plan now to spend her remaining days in America.

"I was born in this country," she confided in me one day, when I was there, "and I want to die here, when my time comes."

"But I thought you were an Englishwoman?" says I, surprised.

"No, only by marriage. I was born in Pennsylvania, of very poor parents, who later were fabulously enriched through the discovery of immense coal deposits on their farm. So you can see, Jerry, why my sympathies have always been with the under-privileged. I know what it is to be poor myself."

She sure is a grand old lady, all right.

Poppy is going to tell you his next story him-

self, as I wasn't with him when he had that amazing adventure at the Green Monkey Inn.

THE MONKEY'S PAW!—a baffling swift-moving detective story, full of thrills and mystery, an entirely new type of story for Poppy. You'll delight in his new skill, as he unravels the mystery, and shiver with him in that perilous moment when death itself stalked the dim corridors of the strangely named inn.

Watch for it! It's a thriller!

THE END

BOOKS BY LEO EDWARDS

ILLUSTRATED. EVERY VOLUME COMPLETE IN ITSELF.

Hundreds of thousands of boys and girls have laughed until their sides ached over the weird and wonderful adventures of Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott and their friends. Mr. Edwards' boy characters are real. They do the things other boys like. Pirates! Mystery! Detectives! Adventure! Ghosts! Buried Treasure! Achievement! Stories of boys making things, doing things, going places—always on the jump and always having fun. His stories are for boys and girls of all ages.

THE JERRY TODD BOOKS

JERRY TODD AND THE WHISPERING MUMMY
JERRY TODD AND THE ROSE-COLORED CAT
JERRY TODD AND THE OAK ISLAND TREASURE
JERRY TODD AND THE WALTZING HEN
JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG
JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG
JERRY TODD IN THE WHISPERING CAVE
JERRY TODD: PIRATE
JERRY TODD AND THE BOB-TAILED ELEPHANT
JERRY TODD: EDITOR-IN-GRIEF
JERRY TODD: CAVEMAN
JERRY TODD AND THE FLYING FLAPDOODLE
JERRY TODD AND THE BUFFALO BILL BATHTUB

THE POPPY OTT BOOKS

POPPY OTT AND THE STUTTERING PARROT
POPPY OTT'S SEVEN LEAGUE STILTS
POPPY OTT AND THE GALLOPING SNAIL
POPPY OTT'S PEDIGREED PICKLES
POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH
POPPY OTT AND THE TITTERING TOTEM
POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE
POPPY OTT HITS THE TRAIL

GROSSET & DUNLAP *Publishers* NEW YORK

TALES OF ADVENTURE IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST

By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

THE GRIZZLY KING

The story of Thor, the biggest grizzly in the Rockies, and the hunter who pursued but never shot him.

NOMADS OF THE NORTH

Neewa, the bear cub, and Miki, the pup, separated from their master, grow up in the wilderness until, in the end, they find him and bring to him the girl he loves.

SWIFT LIGHTNING

The adventures of a wolf in whose veins is a drop of dog blood. His desperate combats and killings, and his mating with a lost collie make a tale of breathless suspense.

THE WOLF HUNTERS

A tenderfoot, a young Indian and their faithful guide battle courageously with a savage band of outlaw Indians in the Canadian wilderness.

THE GOLD HUNTERS

A search for a lost gold mine leads the three heroes of "The Wolf Hunters" on a hazardous trail of mystery and amazing adventure.

BACK TO GOD'S COUNTRY

The courage and devotion of Wapi, the wolf dog, saves the life of a woman imprisoned on an ice-bound ship in the Far North.

THE GOLDEN SNARE

Philip Raine, of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, taken prisoner by the murderer he is pursuing, finds strange adventure with a half-mad wolf-man, a beautiful girl and a courageous Swede.

GROSSET & DUNLAP *Publishers* NEW YORK

On the Trail of Clues and Criminals

Illustrated. Every Volume Complete in Itself.

Frank and Joe Hardy are sons of a celebrated detective. Often the boys help him in his investigations. In their spare hours and during vacations they follow up clues "on their own hook." These activities lead them into many strange adventures and dangerous situations. Yet their efforts are usually successful in tracking down criminals. These stories are packed with action, adventure and mystery.

THE HARDY BOYS STORIES

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

THE TOWER TREASURE
THE HOUSE ON THE CLIFF
THE SECRET OF THE OLD MILL
THE MISSING CHUMS
HUNTING FOR HIDDEN GOLD
THE SHORE ROAD MYSTERY
THE SECRET OF THE CAVES
THE MYSTERY OF CABIN ISLAND
THE GREAT AIRPORT MYSTERY
WHAT HAPPENED AT MIDNIGHT
WHILE THE CLOCK TICKED
FOOTPRINTS UNDER THE WINDOW
THE MARK ON THE DOOR
THE HIDDEN HARBOR MYSTERY
A FIGURE IN HIDING

GROSSET & DUNLAP *Publishers* NEW YORK

WESTERN STORIES FOR BOYS

By JAMES CODY FERRIS

Each Volume Complete in Itself.

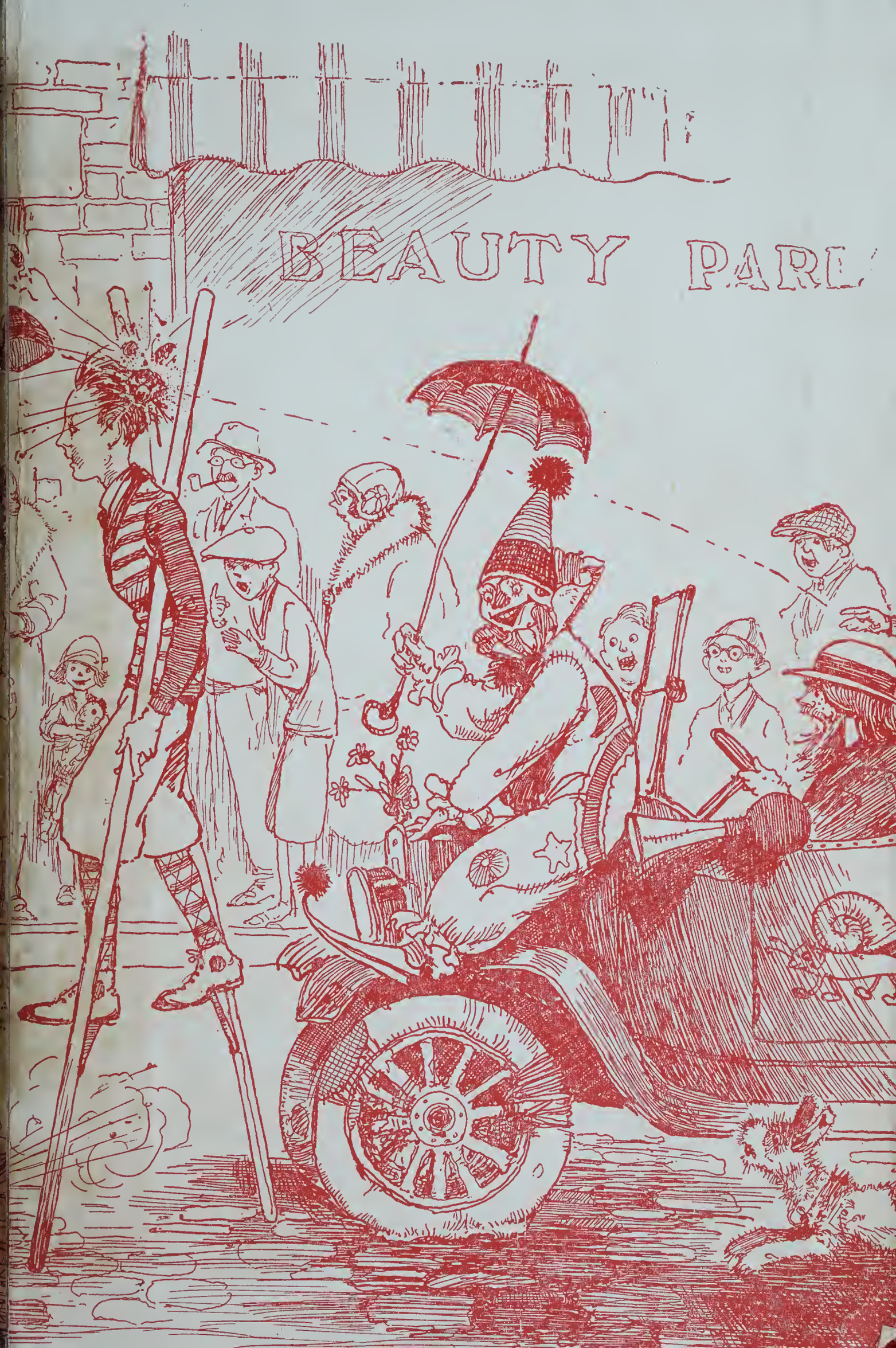
Thrilling tales of the great west, told primarily for boys but which will be read by all who love mystery, rapid action, and adventures in the great open spaces.

The cowboys of the X Bar X Ranch are real cowboys, on the job when required, but full of fun and daring—a bunch any reader will be delighted to know.

THE X BAR X BOYS ON THE RANCH
THE X BAR X BOYS IN THUNDER CANYON
THE X BAR X BOYS ON WHIRLPOOL RIVER
THE X BAR X BOYS ON BIG BISON TRAIL
THE X BAR X BOYS AT THE ROUND-UP
THE X BAR X BOYS AT NUGGET CAMP
THE X BAR X BOYS AT RUSTLER'S GAP
THE X BAR X BOYS AT GRIZZLY PASS
THE X BAR X BOYS LOST IN THE ROCKIES
THE X BAR X BOYS RIDING FOR LIFE
THE X BAR X BOYS IN SMOKY VALLEY
THE X BAR X BOYS AT COPPERHEAD GULCH
THE X BAR X BOYS BRANDING THE WILD HERD
THE X BAR X BOYS AT THE STRANGE RODEO
THE X BAR X BOYS WITH THE SECRET RANGERS
THE X BAR X BOYS HUNTING THE PRIZE MUSTANGS

GROSSET & DUNLAP *Publishers* NEW YORK


PEDI-
GREED


BEAUTY PARL